

**Woman-Animal Companionship:
A Multispecies Home of Ministry**

by

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This work is lovingly dedicated to the dogs who have been part of my life:

**Tasya
Lucia
Pancake**

In the afterlife, we will all be together.

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Abstract

Gaizel Arguelles Adan

Woman-Animal Companionship: A Multispecies Home of Ministry

In the Philippines, the kinship between single women and companion animals is critiqued for not being aligned with the Christian tradition of marriage and family. Literature indicates that this ideology is rooted in anthropocentric, patriarchal, colonial, and imperial logics of domination that simultaneously marginalize both women and animals. Through phenomenological interviews, ten (10) Filipino single women aged 26–60 described their relationships with their companion animals. Employing the frameworks of *Laudato Si*'s ecological conversion, ecofeminism, postcolonial ecofeminism, and feminist standpoint epistemology—supported by literature on feminist animal care, Franciscan animal spirituality, and critical animal studies—the data reveal that this kinship is a ministry praxis that exhibits ecological conversion, which I call a *multispecies home of ministry*. This ministry praxis facilitates spiritual and environmental development through embodied and sensorial relations with companion animals. Moreover, it disrupts interwoven systems of marginalization against women and animals. Ultimately, this expression of ecological conversion contributes to the healing of our relationship with creation and serves as a liberatory model for the practice of human-animal companionship. This model of ministry praxis calls for a reframing of how we define ministry—one that is multispecies, reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and homegrown.

Introduction

General Topic of the Thesis-Project

Despite pets or companion animals¹ becoming an integral part of the family and home of their human companions,² the kinship between single women and companion animals often carries negative connotations. This is exemplified by the ‘crazy cat lady’ trope, which disparages women for not having a traditional family. As single women are perceived to be more miserable and lonely compared to married people,³ companion animals are framed as mere substitutes to children. This stems from patriarchal standards that equate a meaningful life with marriage, and thereby marginalizes those who are unmarried or do not have a domestic partner.⁴

¹ The term ‘companion animals’ refers to domesticated animals, whether domestically bred or taken from the wild, that closely live with humans for psychological support, company, enjoyment, or work. See T. D. Maaten der Sterneberg-Van et al., “Benefits and risks for people and livestock of keeping companion animals: searching for a healthy balance,” *Journal of Comparative Pathology* 155, no. 1 (2016): S10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcpa.2015.06.007>. It departs from the term ‘pets’ that carries semblance of hierarchy and dominance of humans over animals.

² ‘Human companions’ refers to humans who serve as caretakers of companion animals. They have the assumed responsibility of providing care for their companion animals as they share a living arrangement with them.

³ Janine Hertel, Astrid Schütz, Bella M. DePaulo, Wendy L. Morris, and Tanja S. Stucke, “She’s Single, so What? How Are Singles Perceived Compared With People Who Are Married? Sie Ist Single ..., Na Und? Wie Werden Singles Im Vergleich Zu Verheirateten Personen Wahrgenommen?,” *Journal of Family Research* 19 (2) (September 1, 2007), 148. <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-301>.

⁴ Bella M. DePaulo and Wendy L. Morris, “The Unrecognized Stereotyping and Discrimination Against Singles,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 15, no. 5 (October 1, 2006): 251–54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00446.x>.

This prejudice about single women and companion animals is rooted in a systemic reality. We find patriarchy in the backdrop of human-animal relations influencing how we view and treat animals and women. From an ecofeminist view of creation, it is contended that patriarchal and androcentric models of progress and development subjugate women and creation, including animals. Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests that patriarchy or the domination of women is closely linked to the domination of the Earth⁵ whereby mutual relations between humans and creation grew more distant due to the imposition of industrialization and science.⁶ From a postcolonial ecofeminism, Kwok Pui-lan argues that colonial logics have deterred women's agency and their intimate relations with nature by imposing marriage and a Western market system.⁷ For this reason, the severance of the human-animal bond directly subjects animals to systemic human violence and cruelty and single women to inhibiting their bodily autonomy.

Human-animal companionship or the close relationship between animals and humans is argued to be a natural phenomenon (not abnormal) and part of our evolutionary makeup whose origin is linked to women's domestication.⁸ Rosemary Rodd contends that women were the original agents of animal domestication⁹ as they provided milk for domesticating

⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (Harper San Francisco, 1992), 3.

⁶ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 201.

⁷ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 212.

⁸ Stephen H. Webb, "Theology and Dogtalk," *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals*, ed. Stephen H. Webb and Andrew Linzey (New York: 2002; online edn: Oxford Academic, 2011), 110. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195152296.003.0006>.

⁹ In Chapter 4, I will offer critiques of animal domestication and provide an alternative way of looking at human-animal companionship by drawing on the framing of Donna Haraway.

young wolf pups or lambs before animal-producing animals were domesticated.¹⁰

Anchoresses in the medieval period were provided companionship by cats in their seclusion and spiritual journey.¹¹ Filipino Indigenous women would kiss their dogs and show them special care. Lyle Munro posits that women hold a key position in animal protection and advocacy because they care more about “blood, flesh, and pain” (against animal killing and hunting) than their male counterparts.¹² This is a testament to women’s long-standing relationship with and care work for animals.

Bringing ministry—an act of serving God and others—into this purview demands an examination of their relationship beyond the patriarchal presumptions. Is caring for companion animals simply a hobby, a preoccupation, or a replacement for a spouse and children? Or is it something deeper and prophetic, but undermined because of patriarchal narratives? Without maintaining the gendered division of labor that often burdens women in patriarchal societies with care work, this thesis-project captures meanings revealed by woman-animal companionship that offers an alternative pathway for ministry.

This thesis-project espouses a *multispecies*¹³ *home of ministry*—a ministry praxis of care that is reciprocal, multispecies, non-hierarchical, and homegrown—grounded in *Laudato*

¹⁰ Rosemary Rodd, *Biology, Ethics, and Animals* (Oxford Academic, 2011), 229, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198240525.001.0001>.

¹¹ Julian of Norwich was an English anchoress from the 14th century, popularly known for keeping a cat. Her iconography pictures her holding a cat. Anchoresses were allowed to have only one cat as a companion, not any other animal. Aside from accompanying anchoresses in their sacred illumination, cats also served as pest control in the premises. The guideline on having a cat for anchoresses is outlined in *Ancrene Wisse*. See Hugh White, *Ancrene Wisse: Guide for Anchoresses* (Penguin Classics, 1993), 192.

¹² Lyle Munro, “Caring About Blood, Flesh, and Pain: Women’s Standing in the Animal Protection Movement,” *Society and Animals* 9, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 45–58, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853001300108982>.

¹³ In this thesis-project, ‘multispecies’ refers to the interactions of two or more species that affirm that all species are interdependent with each other. The term ‘multispecies home of ministry’ will be defined more directly in the Definition of Terms.

Si's ecological conversion of Filipino single women who actively choose to care for companion animals. Their ministry praxis is perceived as a call to care for animals in response to the broader appeal for communion with animals against animal marginalization in the backdrop. It brings attention to care as a radical response, rather than a socially imposed duty of women. It is a co-constitutive bond that marks a reciprocal exchange as single women also are enriched by their companion animals spiritually and environmentally. Aside from expanding how ministry is defined, this work also contributes to the dearth of studies that explore how companion animals influence human spirituality¹⁴ and how this phenomenon dynamically interacts with environmental consciousness. This model of ministry calls for a reframing of how we define ministry—one that is multispecies, reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and homegrown.

This thesis-project is composed of chapters designed to scaffold toward the main arguments. Its intentional architecture aims to present each chapter as standalone that offers insights into woman-animal companionship. Every chapter addresses one or both arguments while interacting with and informing the rest. It aims to engage creative exploration and depth while forming a cohesive narrative. This methodical intervention is necessary to capture the multidimensional aspect of woman-animal companionship in relation to ecological conversion.

Thesis Statement

Human-animal relations have been fractured by overlapping anthropocentric, patriarchal, and colonial ideals. Inspired by *Laudato Si*'s ecological conversion, this thesis-project examines

¹⁴ Per T. Sangild and Pui Him Ip, "A Spiritual Dimension of Human–Animal Relations?" *Dialog* 64, no. 3 (August 12, 2025): 145, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dial.70009>.

woman-animal companionship as a *multispecies home of ministry*. It employs ecological conversion, ecofeminism, postcolonial ecofeminism, and feminist standpoint epistemology as theoretical frameworks, supported by literature on Franciscan animal spirituality, feminist animal care, and critical animal studies. It also employs phenomenological interviews with Filipino single women to examine this ministry praxis of care for companion animals.

This thesis-project argues that the care these women provide to companion animals constitutes a radical ministry praxis. This reciprocal, multispecies, non-hierarchical, and homegrown ministry praxis disrupts patriarchal, anthropocentric, and colonial norms against women and animals. Moreover, their ministry praxis facilitates spiritual and environmental development through embodied and sensorial relations with their companion animals. Ultimately, this expression of ecological conversion contributes to the healing of our relationship with creation and serves as a liberatory model for the practice of human-animal companionship.

Genesis of my Thesis-Project

My fascination with human-animal relations intersecting with theology started when Pancake, my dog, came into my life. My first encounter with Pancake was when I briefly lived in Siargao, Philippines, in 2021. The beautiful island of Siargao was a perfect setting for a single-woman-meets-a-puppy encounter. It was love at first sight. At that time, I was not in the best psychological state. Seeing her for the first time gladdened my heart.

Having her by my side brought light into my life. She led me to re-establish my daily structure. I had developed a routine with her by waking up early, taking her out for a walk, feeding her, brushing her teeth, bathing her, playing with her, and cuddling with her every

chance I got. She gave me hope—that there was something good to look forward to every day. She healed my brokenness. She was the first to celebrate with me when there was good news and the first one to comfort me when there was bad news.

I have never felt such an immense love for a person. I love my parents and my siblings but my love for Pancake is a different kind of love. I would give my life for her. Sometimes, I wonder why I have this level of love for her. I knew that she provided me with emotional support but that was transcended when I started to receive spiritual comfort. My connection with her turned into a spiritual/religious pondering. Her reciprocal love drew me closer to God. I told myself that if heaven was real, I would strive to be good every day so we could be together in the afterlife. She strengthened my belief in life after death and divine goodness. Consequently, she inspired me to be more compassionate toward other animals and be more conscious of environmental issues.

As a single woman with a companion animal, I often hear people ask me when I will get married and have a family. Others would quip, “You’ll end up as an old maid with your dog!” Philippine society traditionally expects women to marry and bear a child as their ultimate role. By not fulfilling this socially constructed norm, women are stigmatized and believed to live an incomplete and lonely life that impacts their self-worth.¹⁵ They are humorously associated with ending up with companion animals. Having Pancake is the opposite of those assumptions about single women who have companion animals. She has filled the void in my heart that humans have failed to do.

¹⁵ Canesares, Cutie Bacubas et al., “Through the Lens of Solitude: Capturing the Realities of Singlehood Stigma Among Women,” in *Proceedings of the 11th International Scholars Conference* no. 2 (2024): 574-75, <https://jurnal.unai.edu/index.php/isc/article/view/3493>.

Our companionship sparked an inquiry into whether my experience is a shared phenomenon among other Filipino single women who have companion animals. I ask whether they also experience being nourished spiritually and oriented towards a more compassionate stance on ecology and the environment. Ultimately, I was motivated to explore how companion animals can strengthen human spirituality and foster a more pronounced level of compassion for nature in the context of ministry—centering the concept of ecological conversion. As an unpopular ministry praxis, this study can contribute to literature that sheds light on the depth and complexity of human-animal relations in spiritual and environmental development, which is often not underscored in traditional theologies.

Intended Audiences

One of the main tenets of this thesis-project is putting animals at the center of our theological and ministerial discourses in practical theology. As the closest and most immediate representations of animals in our social organization, companion animals are often overlooked in the scope of our care ministry. Therefore, this thesis-project specifically challenges practical theologians to reframe the definition of ministry within a multispecies relational exchange that critiques intersectional forms of marginalization. This is posited as a radical expression of ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'*, where the ministry of care is extended to the most immediate members of our ecological family. It is a move that dismantles deeply embedded structures of domination of creation.

At the level of theological scholarship, this thesis-project is an invitation to practical theologians to ponder how human-animal relations are loci for the emergence of God's prophetic voice that challenges normative ways of fellowship. Moreover, it can provide

reflections on spirituality as a co-constitutive affair between humans and animals by engaging Franciscan animal spirituality.

It is also an invitation for ministry leaders and practitioners to reconsider how animals can be part of our pastoral work. With the growing number of animal cruelty cases both locally and globally, there is a strong need for the Church to do its part in making animals a priority of our service. Through the special attention given to the interwoven power structures (i.e., gender, class, race, etc.) in this work, ministry practitioners are called to address the interrelated systems of marginalization that contour the suffering of animals. Providing pastoral care to people engaged in this type of ministry is essential for supporting not only their work but also their need for an institution that they can depend on. On this note, animal grief is a serious spiritual challenge that the Church can assist with.

Moreover, this thesis-project addresses ministers involved in sharing the Gospel by inviting them to recover animals in our pastoral sensibilities through homilies and sermons that vivify a positive image of animals. This work can provide them with a feminist critical animal lens that challenges the anthropocentric biases of philosophies and theologies that do not honor the dignity of animals. It can provide a renewed understanding of animals and their capacity to have a meaningful relationship with us and influence our spiritual and environmental development.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Achievable Goals

This thesis-project closely examines woman-animal companionship as a ministry praxis of ecological conversion referred to as *multispecies home of ministry*. It fosters a

multispecies, reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and homegrown care for companion animals while simultaneously being developed spiritually and environmentally by companion animals. This multispecies home of ministry is never isolated from the turmoil of societal marginalization but is active in resisting forms of oppression rooted in patriarchal, anthropocentric, colonial, and imperial logics of domination. The following are recognized achievable goals of this study:

1. It offers the *multispecies home of ministry* as an alternative ministry praxis that fosters multispecies, reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and homegrown care—that departs from the traditional way of framing ministry. Although *Laudato Si'* outlines foundational pathways to ecological conversion, this thesis-project provides a liberatory model that cultivates care for our common home that is attentive to existing oppressive structures.
2. It proposes feminist animal care and Franciscan animal spirituality as lenses to appreciate the unique traits of animals and recognize them as beings possessing personhood. This effort redresses theological and philosophical ideals that espouse anthropocentric, patriarchal, and colonial views of animals.
3. It provides empirical evidence of how companion animals enrich one's spirituality through embodied and sensorial connections. The insights on this can inform our ways of communing with them, highlighting that animals—regardless of species—are not passive members of our homes but active agents of meaning and care. Therefore, interacting with them and involving them in our spiritual expressions are pathways to knowing God.

4. It fosters a recognition of the relationship between Filipino single women and companion animals as a beautiful kinship of love and care—amidst their binding marginalization. This work retrieves the valuable work of women in caring for creation not as an imposed responsibility but a freely and actively chosen one. This is symbolized by the *babaylan*¹⁶ image of the Filipino woman.

Recognized Limitations

While this work attempted to reach its fullest potential, it comes with limitations that keep its scope clearer and more focused. The term *multispecies home of ministry* is a reconceptualization of ministry that emerged from the subjectivities of the participating single women. It reflects an experience of a cyclic ecological conversion—one not intended to pinpoint where exactly one begins and ends—that translates the personal to the political and the private to the public. Therefore, the assertion of the term is a framing of the phenomenon taking place among the participants and not an actual ministry program ready to be implemented in different local churches. Nonetheless, the term is a strong call for a reframing of ministry and what it must entail to make it liberatory. Moreover, it provides a theoretical underpinning for what a multispecies ministry is like on the ground—reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and homegrown. It is rooted in Franciscan animal spirituality and feminist animal care employing listening, discovering, obedience, and emotional attunement.

This study focuses on companion animals. However, despite this concentration, my analysis and the content of this work cannot completely depart from the larger view of

¹⁶ The *babaylan* (or *babaylanes*) were priestesses in the Philippine precolonial era who had political influence and expertise in religious rites, medicine, and nature. Catholic missionaries demonized them to break their power by referring to their nature-oriented rituals as witchcraft and demonic. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

animals. While companion animals, as a specific group, have a unique set of experiences, I eschew isolating them from other animals because all animals share common vulnerabilities and realities within the patriarchal, anthropocentric, and colonial frameworks of the human perspective.

Spirituality and environmental consciousness/awareness are examined in this work. It asks if companion animals bridge these in their human companions. These two critical points for exploration were neatly defined in the analyzed data. Therefore, although mental health surfaced in the interviews, it was cited but not examined in great detail, to maintain the study's focus on ecological conversion involving a spiritual and environmental enrichment. These terms are part of the definition of terms under methodology.

Since most of the single women participants in this study come from a Christian background—whether actively practicing or not—the spiritual phenomenon presented here may not speak for all religious backgrounds. However, it provides relevant data points for how spiritual meanings are facilitated by companion animals. Moreover, given the social location of the participants—who have at least a college education and a secure job—their capacity to care for companion animals may not reflect the capacity of other single women. Therefore, the phenomenon of their ministry praxis also emerged from their positionality. I argue, however, that despite this, their shared experiences reveal that financial challenges remain involved in their care work, alongside the forms of marginalization they experience as single women.

Most of the participants are part of my network, which set a non-threatening environment for them to engage in the interviews. To mitigate factors that could affect data quality, I emphasized in the informed consent form that they did not have to prepare or be

concerned about whether their answers were right or wrong. Additionally, the tone of the interviews was more conversational than an interrogation. While it may seem that my personal connection with them was a disadvantage, I observed that it was a currency for greater openness to talk about their experiences, as they knew that I also had a dog and they knew my dog, Pancake. Our shared identities and personal knowledge helped create a space of listening.

Potential Ministerial Import

Promising contributions to ministry are inherent in this thesis-project. As previously established, the term *multispecies home of ministry* cultivates a multispecies, reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and homegrown ministry praxis that places companion animals at the center of our care. This foundational reframing of ministry is an invitation to translate this work into a future, tangible ministry program that centers feminist animal care and Franciscan animal spirituality at the heart of the program to expand the Church's ecological conversion. Through this localized (home) approach, ministry becomes more accessible. When a pastor or priest, for example, mentions in their homily that companion animals are "kin" or beings under our care, it shifts the paradigm from ownership to fellowship.

Moreover, this work provides narratives of single women and their companion animals regarding their intertwined marginalization. Thus, this research invites the Church—particularly leaders such as clergy and religious who hold institutional power—to destigmatize single women and their intentional practice of care. Furthermore, these leaders must communicate to the faithful that every vocation is holy and equally valuable. In a

broader context, care must be stressed as everybody's work for the ecological family;¹⁷ it must not be solely designated to women.

Exposing the realities of marginalization through the lens of postcolonial feminism, this work can assist ministers in reflecting on how they can strengthen human capacities to care for animals, as well as their ability to provide support to those engaged in the work. Animal grief is a serious spiritual reality for people who have lost a companion animal. However, this struggle is trivialized because of the lack of value attached to animals. Thus, this work can be an impetus for a shift from pet blessings to authentic and integrated support for both animals and humans in this ministry praxis.

Its focus on human-animal companionship as spiritual nourishment could encourage groups and communities of older and sick people to consider caring for companion animals as a ministry commitment to give them hope in their journey through life.

METHODOLOGY

Laudato Si's Ecological Conversion: Theological and Ministry Framework

This thesis-project argues that the care single women provide to companion animals is a radical ministry praxis, referred to as a *multispecies home of ministry*. As they perform this praxis of care, they are drawn to personal and communal renewal—spiritually and environmentally—facilitated by their companion animals. This, indeed, is an embodiment of *Laudato Si's* ecological conversion.

¹⁷ Agnes M. Brazal, "Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si'*: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (May 2021): 226, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000614>.

Ecological conversion, as a theological framework, posits that the quality of our relationship with creation is rooted in how we have encountered Christ or the divine.¹⁸ It highlights the integral relationship we all share with all beings, stemming from our relationship with God. It is anchored in *Laudato Si*'s overarching teaching on integral ecology.

As a theological term, integral ecology recognizes two essential points: 1) the web of relationships that builds up the planet with God as the center¹⁹ and 2) the environmental crisis that has been pervasively present due to our destruction of these relationships. Integral ecology is an approach to environmental degradation that takes into account the social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of the problem.

In this study, the binding marginalization of single women and animals is approached by consulting various disciplines. Thus, a postcolonial ecofeminist lens, which will be discussed thoroughly later, is applied to scrutinize the socio-political variables that shape the lived experiences of single women and their companion animals. Moreover, the restoration of the dignity of animals in our appraisal is explored with the use of various lenses other than

¹⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si*' [Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home], The Holy See, June 18, 2015, sec. 217, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html.

¹⁹ Integral ecology as a term first appeared in the work of Hilary Moore, *Marine Ecology*, published in 1958. The term was used to refer to the study of ecosystems and the study of organisms. See Hilary B. Moore, *Marine Ecology* (New York (State): Wiley, 1958), 7. *Laudato Si*' remarks that integral ecology is the interconnectedness of everything. It is also referred to as an interdisciplinary approach to addressing environmental problems, taking into consideration the social, political, cultural, and economic aspects of issues. A definition of integral ecology that resonates with the ministerial aspect of this thesis-project is "the practical expression of a theological and philosophical commitment to the value of all life with special attention to the most vulnerable creatures on earth. It gives, therefore, priority to those who are living in extreme poverty and living creatures under threat of extinction." See Celia Deane-Drummond and Séverine Deneulin, "Integral Ecology: Discovering its Meaning and Depth," LSRI Briefing Note 1 (Oxford: Laudato Si' Research Institute, Campion Hall, 2021), 1, <https://lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/LSRI%20Briefing%20Note%201%20Integral%20Ecology.pdf>.

theological ones: posthumanism and feminist science studies, Filipino indigenous animal practices, Franciscan animal spirituality, feminist animal care, and critical animal studies.

As a ministry framework, ecological conversion stirs a paradigm shift toward greater love for creation upon recognizing its worth as kin and members of the ecological family—which “excludes nothing and no one.”²⁰ Care for companion animals, as a reciprocal and non-hierarchical practice of ministry, cultivates embodied and sensorial relations that forge a transcendence of one’s love for companion animals to other animals and members of creation. Ecological conversion frames ministry as a holistic conversion of a person’s disposition, moral values, and spirituality, all directed toward repairing our relationship with creation. Despite the scarcity of theologies that honor the *glory* of animals, there are traditions of spirituality that recognize animals as agents who enrich human spirituality and environmental consciousness, such as Franciscan animal spirituality. Indeed, Franciscan spirituality provided a theological spine for *Laudato Si’*.

Integral ecology, as an interdisciplinary approach, calls for an intricate analysis of the various areas of woman-animal companionship in this study. This thesis-project is very intentional in critiquing systems of oppression that implicate both single women and companion animals in an interwoven experience of marginalization.

Ecofeminism and Postcolonial Ecofeminism

From a postcolonial standpoint, Agnes Brazal critiques *Laudato Si’* for not incorporating a gender lens that dismantles the traditional association of women with nature—a correlation in which women are assumed to be the sole agents of care.²¹ However,

²⁰ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, sec. 92.

²¹ Brazal, “Ethics of Care,” 222.

I argue that women's care for creation can be agentic and liberatory if it is freely chosen and realized in the context of our fellowship with creation. This is a signpost to stress that this thesis-project does not see single women, or women in general, as homogenous. There are women who have more access to resources and support that allow them to use their agency to respond to environmental crises. However, this does not mean that they are free from the claws of the systemic forms of domination. Therefore, this study frames care as an agentic response to the call of animals for a co-constitutive form of care by virtue of mutual relations amidst marginalization. This framing is a departure from the traditional designation of care to women, maintained by the Western ideology of marriage and family.

Kwok Pui-lan remarks that patriarchal and colonial forces are “drastically altering” women's bodily autonomy and agency through marriage and the gendered division of labor, as well as their relationship with nature through capitalism.²² Postcolonial societies like the Philippines still experience the remnants of colonial influence, and imperialism is embedded in the current government structure and economic models. Through the insistence on marriage, Filipino single women are conditioned to believe that being a wife is the “highest feminine achievement,”²³ which ties their worth to men and marriage. That is why when they fail to meet this social expectation, they are humorously associated with ending up with companion animals to mitigate their loneliness. Society impinges on the agency and autonomy of single women through pressures to marry, lest they become a metaphor for

²² Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination*, 212.

²³ Eleanor R. Dionisio, “Sex and Gender,” in *Sex And Gender in Philippine Society: A Discussion of Issues on the Relations Between Women and Men*, ed. by Elizabeth U. Eviota (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, 1994), 8.

misery. Furthermore, the implication of animals in this construct is a manifestation of colonial legacies entrenched in the culture of marriage and family.

Ivone Gebara's exposure to the women of Latin America's intersectional marginalization together with the environment asks, "to what human experience do we refer when we speak of God?"²⁴ suggesting a recovery of the lived experiences of those who have been dispossessed of knowledge at the crux of knowledge production in understanding our faith and the world. Ecofeminist epistemology percolates a process of knowing that extends beyond anthropocentric horizons and accommodates "relatedness," as put by Gebara, in which we "give up anthropocentrism and some of our imperialism vis-a-vis the rest of the cosmos."²⁵ This process, therefore, is an inclusive form of dialogue²⁶ that serves as an impetus to surrender to the ecological wisdom finally offered to us, not just by our fellow humans but also by the environment.

While the focus of this work is on the shared stories of single women and companion animals, their stories intermingle with the rest of the cosmos. Their shared homes, survival, and belonging have been shaped by the world we have all co-created. As such, their narratives reflect the realities of our world today that are critical to our building of universal communion. An ecofeminist lens in analyzing the impairment of human-animal relations, domination and stigmatization of women, and the abuse and violence against animals, weaves a contextualized socio-cultural and political landscape of the companionship between companion animals and single women. Their mutual relationship serves as a refuge and

²⁴ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Fortress Press, 1999), 50.

²⁵ Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 92.

²⁶ Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 92.

liberation for each other, which impacts single women's spiritual and environmental development.

Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

Building on Ivone Gebara's call for the recognition of marginalized voices, I intentionally amplify the narratives of both single women and companion animals. Applying feminist standpoint epistemology that honors the epistemic privilege of women as a marginalized group towards activism and transformation,²⁷ I contend that Filipino single women's narratives about woman-animal companionship are a site of ministry praxis that is liberatory and transformative. Patricia Hill Collins articulates that feminist standpoint epistemology contributed to the feminist movement by "bring[ing] women's group consciousness into being."²⁸

It is not only the voice of single women that is showcased in this study, but also the animal voice. Contrary to anthropocentric assumptions, animals have their own voice, which they communicate through their vocalizations, behaviors, and gaze.²⁹ As collaborators with animals, Josephine Donovan argues that humans can echo the plights of animals.³⁰ Following this, the single women in this study not only captured their personal experiences as human

²⁷ Abigail Brooks, "Feminist Standpoint Epistemology: Building Knowledge and Empowerment Through Women's Lived Experience," in *SAGE Publications, Inc. eBooks*, 2007, 63–65, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984270.n3>.

²⁸ Patricia Hill Collins, "Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited': Where's the Power?," *Signs* 22, no. 2 (January 1, 1997): 380, <https://doi.org/10.1086/495162>.

²⁹ Anja M. Thomsen et al., "Listen to Us: Perceptions of Animal Voice and Agency," *Animals* 13, no. 20 (October 19, 2023): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13203271>.

³⁰ Josephine Donovan, "Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue," *Signs* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 320, <https://doi.org/10.1086/491750>.

companions, but also amplified on a larger platform the experiences of their companion animals. Ultimately, their narratives are not flat stories but a locus of subjectivities that express the voices of single women and companion animals about their marginalization.

The diagram below illustrates the theoretical map of this thesis-project. Integral ecology represents the original harmony of relationships within creation. However, because of humanity's outright establishment of power and control—rooted in patriarchal, anthropocentric, colonial, and imperial logics of domination—this harmony has been impaired. One of the manifestations of this impairment is the binding marginalization of women and animals. Responding to the call of animals to be homed, fed, healed, and loved, single women respond through their care, which becomes a *multispecies home of ministry*. This ministry praxis fosters mutual relations where single women are enriched by their companion animals spiritually and environmentally. All this evidence of the restoration and renewal of relationships points to the single women's ecological conversion. Since their ministry praxis is profound, they are led toward a holistic transformation. Ultimately, single women's ministry praxis becomes a rebuttal against the logics of interwoven systems of power.



Fig. 0.1. Diagram of Theoretical Frameworks

Definition of Terms

The following are the operative terms used in this thesis-project:

- ***Multispecies Home of Ministry***- refers to Filipino single women's ministry praxis of care toward their companion animals. This type of ministry expands the traditional framing of ministry—or service to God and God's people—that is often anthropocentric, hierarchical, based on formal authorization, and performed outside the home. This ministry praxis fosters a localized, reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and embodied act of service to nonhuman species. It is co-constitutive because it honors

how companion animals also enrich single women spiritually and environmentally.

This ministry praxis resists all structures that place women and animals in a binding state of marginalization and repudiates the colonial co-option of the concepts of family and intimacy. Furthermore, all these attributes of this ministry praxis point to ecological conversion, which is a profound experience of being renewed to be in fellowship with creation.

- ***Companion animals***- commonly known as “pets”—are domesticated animals that live in a shared space with humans for the purpose of companionship and emotional support.
- ***Spirituality***- is a way of life directed toward deepening and transcending meaning by cultivating well-rounded relationships with the self, God, fellow beings, and the whole creation through embodied and sensorial ways of knowing. This definition is adapted from Claire E. Wolfeich’s³¹ definition with a slight expansion to capture other ways of growing in spirituality, including the reciprocal relationship with animals.
- ***Environmental awareness/consciousness***- refers to the recognition of our interdependence with the rest of creation, providing the foundation for understanding that the environment and all its elements (nature, animals, plants, landscapes, etc.) are in a serious state of decline. This consciousness is translated into action by changing one's lifestyle, engaging in environmental advocacy work, and critiquing behaviors that do not align with the preservation and protection of the environment.

³¹ Claire E. Wolfeich, “Spirituality,” In *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011), 331.

Research Methods

The method for gathering data was phenomenology, an approach to research that examines a common phenomenon experienced by a group of people.³² I used phenomenological interviews to explore the common lived experiences of Filipino single women and their relationship with their companion animals. I wanted to know how these single women minister to companion animals and how they are enriched spiritually and environmentally by them. Mark Bevan notes that a phenomenological interview is less concerned about the structure than the process of investigation.³³ Through a “phenomenological reduction” of asking questions, the interview should focus on how the participants are able to describe their world and their subjectivities. The interview, therefore, needs to refrain from “theory-laden questions.”³⁴ From this objective, I made semi-structured and open-ended questions that worked as a guide for the interviews. The questions were curated to elicit narratives and in-depth descriptions.

1. Tell me about your relationship with your companion animal.
2. What is it like to care for your companion animal?
3. When you think about your companion animal, what image or memory comes to mind? Why?
4. Describe an experience when others reacted to your relationship with your companion animal? What was that like for you?

³² John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 75.

³³ Mark T. Bevan, “A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing,” *Qualitative Health Research* 24, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732313519710>.

³⁴ Bevan, “A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing,” 139.

5. When you think of spirituality (connection with God, the divine, sacredness, love, holiness, and justice), how does that come into play with your relationship with your companion animal?
6. How does your relationship with your companion animal influence the way you see the environment or nature?

Participant Selection

Participant selection was guided by purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Most of the participants came from my network, and others were referred to me by the previous participants. Each was sent an email invitation with an attached informed consent form. I gave the participants some time to think about their participation in the interview. As soon as they had confirmed their willingness, I sent them the details of our online interview.

The main criteria for choosing the participants were their age (26-60), single status (never married), residence in the Philippines, and having at least one companion animal. Three (3) are in the age bracket 26-30, two (2) are in 36-40, one (1) is in 41-45, one (1) is in 46-50, two (2) are in 51-55, and one (1) is in 56-60. Seven (7) participants are based in Manila or NCR, and three (3) participants are based in three different provinces. Their location somehow textured responses pertaining to how their respective communities regard animals. Eight (8) of the participants have dogs, 1 has a cat, and 1 has a combination of dogs and a cat. None of them has non-traditional companion animals. The majority of them have Christian backgrounds, whether practicing or non-practicing. All of them have at least a college education and hold a professional job. Their educational and economic demographics are essential data points that have allowed them to care for companion animals. Thus, their

narratives may be different from those of other Filipino single women who have companion animals. Nonetheless, their narratives provided substantial data for understanding how their relationships with their companion animals are impinged on by systemic marginalization against both parties, sustained by patriarchal domination.

Data Gathering

From September 2025 to April 2026, I conducted online interviews with the ten (10) single women based on the selection process above. Each interview was held via Zoom and lasted an average of one (1) hour. Before formally starting the interview, I briefly reiterated the content of the informed consent form with an emphasis on the purpose of the study, anonymity, and the extent of their participation based on the informed consent form they signed. With the participants' permission, I recorded each interview. Consent was obtained through the signed informed consent form prior to the interview and verbal confirmation at the start of each interview. Zoom's closed captioning feature generated supporting documents for the data transcription process.

The interview questions were not direct in eliciting specific information to uphold the integrity of the data. In some situations, the questions tended to sound vague or broad. To address this, I rephrased the questions or offered probing questions. However, I ensured this accommodation did not alter the substance of the questions. When the responses of the participants needed further elaboration or explanation, I asked for clarification with phrases such as, "Could you please tell me more about that?" or "What do you mean by that?" The participants generously explained what they wanted to say or clarified their statements. The atmosphere of the interview maintained a conversational tone to ease any discomfort and

pressure. They were reminded to answer only the questions they felt comfortable discussing. None of them skipped any questions, but when I felt that the participants seemed reluctant to discuss specific questions, I withheld from probing.

Data Analysis

I performed a multi-step process prescribed by phenomenological data analysis: (1) highlighting significant statements, (2) developing key descriptions, (3) identifying the “essence,” and (4) interpreting the “essence.”³⁵ This procedural work entailed identifying emerging themes, paying attention to patterns, and formulating balanced interpretations.

During the interview, I prepared an interview sheet where I typed in my field notes and the basic demographics of each participant. After conducting all the interviews, I read the transcripts and paid attention to the meanings and feelings that the participants wanted to convey. As human agents of animal voice, I paid close attention to what was being communicated by animals through the participants. I listened to the recordings if there were unclear transcriptions. This is where I highlighted significant statements. As much as possible, during the first round of understanding the data, I set aside my assumptions, the theories I studied, and my personal experiences as a companion to my dog. Although I had prior research arguments, I allowed the natural materialization of data to take place.

From the highlighted statements, I was able to develop key descriptions. To organize the highlighted statements, I prepared an interview matrix where I categorized salient interview data with these groupings: (1) meanings attached to companion animals, (2)

³⁵ Creswell and Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*, 79-80.

experience/relationship with companion animals, (3) personal realizations/insights, and (4) society's perceptions of companion animals or animals in general.

From the grouped data in the matrix, I observed patterns, similarities, and differences in views and experiences. I paid attention to keywords that shared similar meanings despite being expressed differently. This led to the development of the essence of the data. An essence is a "structure of essential meanings" present in the phenomenon or the common experience of the participants.³⁶ The essence of the data constitutes the meaning-making, interpretations, and feelings of the participants. In other words, essence refers to the subjectivities communicated by the participants, which they interpret with their own worldview. Simultaneously, I validated the meanings attached to their statements against the overall narratives using the original transcriptions. I also noted complex ideas that were individually nuanced by the participants.

Finally, I synthesized the emerging themes into a final description of the essence of the phenomenon. Ivone Gebara postulates that feminist phenomenology serves as a lens into women's reality, in which interpretation is a prerequisite for comprehending their external and internal realities.³⁷ Interpretation of data was a crucial task in this study. This study involved collaborative interpretation of data from participating single women as interlocutors and myself as the researcher. The participating single women provided their own meaning and interpretation to their experience by exercising their epistemic privilege.

³⁶ Karin Dahlberg, "The Essence of Essences/ the Search for Meaning Structures in Phenomenological Analysis of Lifeworld Phenomena," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482620500478405>.

³⁷ Ivone Gebara, *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 13-14.

In phenomenological research, the primary source of interpretation is the person who experienced the phenomenon.³⁸ Thus, my goal was to dive deep into the reflections of the participants and discover what they intended to say—and not say—carried out through a reflexive pulling of their interpretation. I made sense of the essence by maintaining the original intent of the participants. Consequently, I provided a secondary or ancillary interpretation by making sense of the participants' collective responses guided by my literature review and other preliminary research.

Ethical Considerations

Patriarchy falls within the horizon of this research endeavor. This study attempts to contribute to dismantling the patriarchal, colonial, hierarchical, and dualist ways we perceive human-animal companionship in theology. Hence, from the conception of this study down to the writing, the practice of feminist research principles has informed my conduct. Because power asymmetries exist between the researcher and the participants, it is my responsibility to practice reflexivity at all times. Alison Jaggar articulates that feminist research principles involve respecting all research subjects, recognizing their subordination and marginalization, upholding their dignity and safety, and having integrity as a researcher.³⁹ To ensure anonymity, all participants' real names have been changed, and the names of their companion animals have been redacted.

Due to the sensitive nature of the data provided by one participant, I decided to conduct participant validation. Because her affiliation and work-related information are

³⁸ Bevan, "A Method of Phenomenological Interviewing," 137.

³⁹ Alison M. Jaggar, *Just Methods: An Interdisciplinary Feminist Reader* (2nd ed.) (Routledge), p. 457-460. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315636344>.

particularly sensitive, I reached out to her during the data analysis stage to share a draft of my findings. I asked her to identify which professional details she was willing to disclose, as this information is critical to analyzing institutional-level animal cruelty practices. Following this review, the participant identified the specific portions of her interview that could be released.

This study affirms the contributions of animals to this work and aims to avoid reproducing the marginalization they already experience. As cited earlier, animals possess their own voice as beings capable of communicating in intelligible ways. These same ethical standards were applied to the depiction of animals in the writing, data gathering, and data analysis. Hence, critical anthropomorphism was employed. This approach postulates the responsible use of language to describe the attributes and realities of animals based on evidence that supports their nature and behavior.⁴⁰

Researcher's Positionality

I stated in the genesis section of this thesis-project that my embodied knowledge of Pancake inspired me to write it. Moreover, my being a Filipino single woman who has a dog—who is always with me and whom I regard as an integral part of my life—has shaped the development of the frameworks, theories, analysis, and reflections of this study. I incorporated my observations of larger global and local issues as a Filipino whose identity has been shaped by both my Western and Philippine education. Donna Haraway posits that

⁴⁰ Critical anthropomorphism argues that humans can use metaphors and observations to describe the behavior of animals as long as these arise from sound scientific findings. It disputes anthropomorphism or attributing human qualities or behaviors to nonhuman entities. This will be further explained in Review of Literature and Sources. See Gordon Burghardt, “Mediating claims through critical anthropomorphism,” *Animal Sentience* 1, no. 3 (2016): 2, <https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1063&context=animsent>

“situated knowledge” in research implies that “the split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history.”⁴¹ I contemplate this in my positioning of many identities at the same time, which is similar to the identities of my fellow single women who have companion animals. My complex identities carried into the study have allowed me to affirm my oneness with the reality but simultaneously critique my assumptions. Ultimately, I cannot completely exist as an outsider or an insider in this study because I represent both positions simultaneously.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

This thesis-project is intentionally structured to provide article-based chapters that scaffold toward the central arguments—forming a cohesive narrative. Each chapter was designed to stand on its own to push the boundaries of analysis and foster a more expansive understanding of the topic. Nonetheless, each chapter provides a signpost as to how it interacts with the others. And each explicitly describes how it addresses the arguments. This approach enables capturing the multidimensional aspect of woman-animal companionship in relation to ecological conversion.

Chapter 1. Ecological Conversion Towards Saving Laika

This chapter begins by describing *Laudato Si*’s integral ecology, which serves as the umbrella concept for ecological conversion. Grounding ecological conversion in integral

⁴¹ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 586, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178066>.

ecology establishes the reality that all beings across God's creation share a relationship. Using feminist images of creation and relationship, a peripheral reading of scriptural texts rooted in anthropocentrism and patriarchy is redressed. Moreover, the case of Laika—the Soviet dog sent into space—is used to elaborate on how patriarchal, anthropocentric, scientific, and geopolitical agendas have historically broken our kinship with animals, a concept referred to as *akinship* by Tijana Vujosevic. Thus, the chapter articulates ecological conversion as a religious and moral posture for repairing our broken relationship with animals and creation. Saving Laika and other animals is proposed as a form of ministry. Through an ecofeminist lens, this chapter argues that care for animals must go beyond traditional practices of ministry, which are often one-sided, anthropocentric, hierarchical, and based on formal authorization.

Chapter 2. Are Animals "It"?

This chapter argues that animals have been marginalized in our language through metaphors and images that subjugate them. In this culture, both animals and women are oppressed by derogatory animal metaphors, which are harsher toward women than men. It is posited that this phenomenon stems from philosophical and theological traditions that espouse human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism. As foundational sources of theology and philosophy, the traditions of Augustine, Aquinas, and Descartes regarding animals are critiqued. To rectify these false and unjust claims, feminist animal care is used to highlight animal reciprocity, which underscores their greatness and capacity for fellowship with us. As a pastoral intervention, naming is proposed as a counter-cultural practice against linguistic violence toward animals.

Chapter 3. Franciscan Animal Spirituality

This chapter addresses the second assertion of this thesis-project: that companion animals assist in the development of human spirituality. Franciscan animal spirituality is proposed as a strand of spirituality in which animals are argued to be part of our spiritual quest. This framework articulates that communing with animals can facilitate spiritual contemplation. It serves as an alternative approach to spirituality, distinct from traditional and Western ways of doing theology, which are often patriarchal, vertical, and anthropocentric. This spirituality is characterized by being Christocentric, sensorial, embodied, kinship-based, and grounded in gratitude for creation. These distinct qualities are rooted in the integral way of life of Saint Francis, who espoused a life in harmony with the rest of creation without partiality toward any species.

Chapter 4. How Companion Animals Shape Environmental Consciousness

This chapter provides theoretical underpinnings for how companion animals inspire humans to become environmentally aware, utilizing the “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis. Simultaneously, it provides an ethical framework for understanding animal domestication within the context of “pet keeping” in contemporary human-animal relations. Pet keeping is therefore balanced against the reality of stray animals who require human assistance to be saved from the cruelty they experience on the streets. Lastly, specific ways the Church can support human companions in forging sincere and embodied relationships with their companion animals are proposed.

Chapter 5. The Enmeshment of Filipino Single Women and Companion Animals in Marginalization

Using postcolonial ecofeminism as a lens, this chapter examines the intersecting marginalization of single women and companion animals in the Philippines—a phenomenon rooted in colonial and imperial domination and maintained by patriarchy. It begins by surveying cultural norms and expectations for single women, arguing that colonial influence has historically deprived women of autonomy and agency, particularly through the imposition of marriage and family. Furthermore, their intimate relationship with nature was curtailed. The marginalization of single women is usually experienced subtly and quietly, called “ambient violence,” which is a remnant of the colonial past of the Philippines.

Similarly, the condition of companion animals is examined. Three cases of animal cruelty are explored, arguing that animal cruelty in the Philippines is located in the home, the church, and the community. This reality has colonial roots that situated animals within the capitalist market, the health and sanitation agenda, and the urbanization of the colony. This chapter proposes a retrieval of the *babaylan* image of the Filipino woman and a revival of positive indigenous animal practices.

Chapter 6. Narratives of Kinship from Multispecies Homes of Ministry

This chapter presents the data gathered through phenomenological interviews. The findings reveal that the participants’ care practices transcend “pet ownership,” which is often perceived as a mere hobby or preoccupation. The data show that their work is indeed a ministry praxis, beginning with a *call* from their animals to which they responded with openness, despite their own personal shortcomings or unreadiness. Within this *multispecies*

home of ministry, the concepts of home and family—traditionally associated with marriage and the nuclear family—are reclaimed. Moreover, care within this fellowship opposes patriarchal, colonial, imperial, and anthropocentric structures. Through embodied and sensorial relational becoming, the participants have been led to experience a profound spiritual and environmental renewal—a phenomenon of ecological conversion.

Chapter 7. Conclusions: A Multispecies Home of Ministry

This chapter summarizes the insights from all previous chapters and proposes the term *multispecies home of ministry* to describe the ministry praxis of Filipino single women who freely choose to care for companion animals as a radical response to their unjust situation. This term espouses a ministry that “excludes nothing and no one,” in the universal family. It proposes a ministry that attends to nonhuman animals within our immediate locales through a reciprocal, non-hierarchical, and embodied manner of service. Moreover, it calls for a shift from pet blessing rituals to authentic pastoral care.

The chapter ends with the image of the woman meat vendor and Tiger, the stray dog in Olongapo, Philippines. This case is featured in Chapter 5. It concludes that women and animals continue to suffer due to overlapping forces of oppression that obscure their realities and trivialize their pain. Through the image of *Pieta*, animated by the theological framework of deep incarnation, this powerful story comes to life. Thus, it calls for the inclusion of animals in our theological and ministerial imagination and praxis.

Chapter 1

Ecological Conversion Towards Saving Laika

*“[S]he must have thought she was going to a home, to a family, and instead they sent her to the loneliest death in the world.”*¹ — Kate Atkinson

Introduction

This chapter examines the meaning and implications of ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'* as a proactive response to the unjust treatment of nonhuman animals. As defined earlier, ecological conversion is a profound personal and communal renewal of our relationship with creation as the outcome of our encounter with Jesus Christ or the divine.² Ecological conversion is rooted in integral ecology, which is a theological posture that acknowledges the value of all life and the interdependence of everything, giving special attention to the most vulnerable creatures on earth.³ Thus, it recognizes the urgency of honoring the interconnection of all beings that emanates from God's creative design and wisdom. Ecological conversion is a commitment to care for creation based on the filial relationship that humans, animals, plants, other life forms, and the natural environment all

¹ Kate Atkinson, *When Will There Be Good News? A Jackson Brodie Novel* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2009), 40.

² Francis, *Laudato Si'* [Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home], The Holy See, June 18, 2015, sec. 217, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

³ This is a reiteration of the definition of integral ecology, first cited in the previous section of this thesis-project. See Celia Deane-Drummond and Séverine Deneulin, “Integral Ecology: Discovering its Meaning and Depth,” LSRI Briefing Note 1 (Oxford: Laudato Si' Research Institute, Campion Hall, 2021), 1, <https://lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/LSRI%20Briefing%20Note%201%20Integral%20Ecology.pdf>.

share under the same Creator. It calls for a reorientation of stewardship that challenges anthropocentric assumptions that subordinate animals.

The story of Laika, the Soviet space dog, illustrates how modern science has historically legitimized the use of animals, perpetuating anthropocentrism, patriarchy, dualism, and human exceptionalism.⁴ Applying an ecofeminist⁵ lens, this chapter articulates how science and progress and other anthropocentric activities act as patriarchal structures⁶ that systemically subjugate animals.

⁴ Scholars and artists have been drawn to analyze and reimagine the story of Laika. Nick Abadzis's historical graphic novel centers on Laika's backstory, her interactions with the scientists who took her in, and her space voyage. David Herman observes that the illustrations prompt reflection on the "speciesist institutional and political ambitions" deeply embedded in animal experimentation, a point highlighted by Cynthia Z. Cohen in her review of Herman's work. For Nick Abadzis's graphic novel on Laika (hosted by the Internet Archive), see Nick Abadzis, *Laika* (New York: First Second, 2007), <https://ia801205.us.archive.org/18/items/LAIKA/laika.pdf>. For Cynthia Z. Cohen's book review, see Cynthia Z. Cohen, "Review of *Narratology beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life*, by David Herman," *Narrative Works* 8, nos. 1–2 (2018): 103, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1059852ar>. For David Herman's analysis of Abadzis's illustrations, see David Herman, "Multispecies Storyworlds in Graphic Narratives," in *Narratology beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 141, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190850401.003.0005>.

Meanwhile, Tijana Vujosevic presents a comprehensive critical evaluation of the tragedy of Laika and other Soviet space dogs, analyzing how patriarchy, science, and politics intersect to transform animals into metaphors for human ambitions. See Tijana Vujosevic, "Homage to the Sad Space Bitch: Laika–Belka–Strelka," *Thresholds* 48 (April 1, 2020): 148–157, https://doi.org/10.1162/thld_a_00718.

Laika represents companion animals and other animal species as subjects of anthropocentric treatment that often involve abuse, violence, and other forms of marginalization. While the historical background of Laika lies in scientific and space exploration, her tragic story is a shared fate of animals in the context of human domination.

⁵ Ecofeminism in theology is a field of study that intertwines ecology and feminism. It examines how women and nature are oppressed by patriarchy as a system of domination that creates vulnerabilities for both at the socio-cultural levels. See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (Harper San Francisco, 1992), 2. Moreover, it centers "relatedness" as part and parcel of understanding the joint oppression of women and the environment, wherein the cosmos is regarded as a source of enlightenment for understanding how we relate to the planet that defies an anthropocentric process of knowing. See Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Fortress Press, 1999), 92. It involves reinterpreting key scriptural meanings to challenge male bias, critiquing anthropocentric and dualist conceptions of nature, honoring women's voices in envisioning the environment, and advancing ethics of care and emotional sensibilities sidelined by patriarchal epistemologies.

⁶ Patriarchal structures are various modes and avenues through which men are positioned as the center of power, knowledge, control, and ownership, arranged and sustained through male privilege within societies. In the context of anthropocentric approaches to science, scientific exploration has historically been dominated by patriarchal logics that privilege men's gaze upon the world, producing patriarchal views of animals that have led to abusive practices in laboratories, industries, and the domestic sphere.

Ecological conversion is a call to ministry that invites us to become aware that we share the same breath and existence with the rest of creation in a universal communion,⁷ which merits responsible caretaking and protection of all of creation, including animals. As a specific framework for ministry, it restores our relationship with God, our ecological family, and the planetary world. However, ecological conversion as a ministry framework must adopt a feminist lens to make it more liberatory. This chapter argues that ecological conversion involves the recognition of all creatures as kin—a conversion from domination to communion, from hierarchy to relationship— that honors the work of women in stimulating human-animal companionship as a ministry praxis. Their ministry praxis departs from traditional definitions of ministry.

Integral Ecology

Laudato Si' is a landmark document in Catholic Social Teaching as it placed the conversation about the ongoing degradation of the environment at the center of the moral concerns of the Catholic Church. Other papal encyclicals had discussed the implications of human activities on the environment and likewise urged for more responsible stewardship;⁸

⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 220.

⁸ *Laudato Si'* has earned a special place in the Catholic Church for a well-rounded stance on caring for the environment, not a movement limited to the Catholic Church, but in unison with other beliefs and nations. Its predecessors paved the way for a more thorough conversation on this issue. Earlier encyclicals that called the Church to care for the environment include *Caritas in Veritate* by Pope Benedict XVI, Pope John Paul II's *Redemptor Hominis*, and *Evangelium Vitae*. Chapter 4 of *Caritas in Veritate*, especially sections 48-52, discusses that human development is closely linked to our duty to the environment and the vulnerable members of our community: "the environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole." See Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* [Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth], The Holy See, July 7, 2009, sec. 43-52, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html. *Redemptor Hominis* warns against excessive use of technology as it interferes with the relationship of humans with nature (section 15). Interestingly, it provides the concept of "kingship" to refer to "the kingly function-the *munus regale* of Christ himself," which calls for the ethical application of technology, prioritizing the primacy of persons over things (section 16). See John Paul

but *Laudato Si'* was the first to lay the groundwork for a more concerted local and global movement. It presents a profound and grounded ecological spirituality—integral ecology—that constitutes a thread of relationship that correlates all living beings and the natural environment. God, as Creator, brought life into beings as a unified whole, with unique elements not for hierarchy but harmony. There is no separation between humans and other life forms. Distinctions between beings elevate the uniqueness of each as the core of God's purposeful design. Theologians are in consensus that creatures were not created arbitrarily, but each with a specific designation of role and purpose that makes them a significant contributory element to the grand scheme of life.⁹ Even the elements that we hardly notice

II, *Redemptor Hominis* [Encyclical Letter on The Redeemer of Man], The Holy See, March 4, 1979, sec. 15-16, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html. *Evangelium Vitae* explains that promoting and defending life entails being “called to till and look after the garden of the world,” or being responsible stewards. See John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* [Encyclical Letter on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life], The Holy See, March 25, 1995, sec. 42, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons, in his response to the growing heresies of his time emerging from Gnosticism, defends the imminence of God as Creator who alone “predestined all things, formed them as he chose, bestowing harmony on all things, assigning them their particular place and the beginning of their creation.” In this statement, Irenaeus affirms that God designated a special purpose for each member of creation, which contributes to the overall wisdom and order of all creation. See James R. Payton, “Exposing Heresy: Disunity among the Gnostics,” in *Irenaeus on the Christian Faith: A Condensation of Against Heresies*, edited by James R. Payton (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2012), 42. On the other hand, Basil of Caesarea commends the distinct forms and characteristics of creatures that make their existence complementary to the design of nature. In his 9th Homily in *Hexaemeron*, he explains the uniqueness of animals. It is noticeable how his theological perspective was influenced by Greek philosophies that support the superiority of humans; however, it also affirms that animals possess traits worth emulating by humans. For instance, he paradoxically describes dogs: “[t]he dog is not gifted with a share of reason; but with him instinct has the power of reason... Does not the gratitude of the dog shame all who are ungrateful to their benefactors?” See Basil of Caesarea, “Homily 9,” in *Hexaemeron*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895), rev. Ed. Kevin Knight, *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/32019.htm>. Thomas Aquinas notes that the distinction and diversity of creation originates from God and is intended to communicate God’s goodness, “Hence we must say that the distinction and multitude of things come from the intention of the first agent, who is God... in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them...” See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1913) I.47.1, https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_%5B1%5D,_EN.pdf#:~:text=Translated%20by%20Fathers%20of%20the,%E2%96%A0%20FIRST%20PART&text=%E2%96%A0%20QUESTION%205.%20OF%20GOODNESS,7.%20THE%20INFINITY%20OF%20GOD.

perform in accordance with the natural orchestration of natural law. Consider the example of microbes that aid in digestion, worms that help break down organic matter, and beneficial bacteria that support our immune system. But even those life forms that we have not yet fully discovered their purpose are essential to a harmonious cohabitation with other living creatures.

The fundamental harmony of all beings and existence weaves into the fabric of biblical literature, in which human life follows the pattern of three integral relationships: with God, with others, and with the earth.¹⁰ This extends to other members of creation who have a relationship with God, with us humans, and with the planet. Integral ecology, therefore, removes barriers that divide us from each other and place exclusivity between humans and God. Integral ecology redresses our myopic view of how God relates to creation—that humans do not have a monopoly on accessing God. As our relational connection with each other and with the world is integral in Scripture, it also declares God’s relationship with the whole cosmos and God’s creative intelligence. Scripture paints a vivid picture of how different creatures represent God’s wisdom in creation. Biblical poetic devices are used to animate sacred realities in which God is represented by a dove (Lk 3:22), wind (Gn 1:1-2; Jn 3:8; Acts 2:2,4), water (Is 44:3-4), and fire (Ex 3:7-14; Mt 3:11).¹¹ These representations take on religious language as a creative expression of God’s presence¹² in a tangible and perceivable way that humans can fathom. Picturing God with the assistance of nature allows God to exist in our consciousness as someone who is accessible, near, and relatable.

¹⁰ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, sec. 66.

¹¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask The Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (A&C Black, 2014), 146-153.

¹² Johnson, *Ask The Beasts*, 146.

Moreover, Scripture equally illuminates God's creative manifestations. This passage in Psalms praises God for the wonder of God's creation that abounds in greatness, "How varied are your works, Lord! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. There is the sea, great and wide! It teems with countless beings, living things both large and small" (Ps 104:24-25). God's creation showcases divine order, variety, and the natural flow of life, in which everything fits perfectly with the existence of another. It reflects the masterful design of each creature. When we look up at the sky, we marvel at the beauty of how the stars are arranged, yet it is equally astonishing to recognize what keeps them intact without causing any gravitational issues. Even creatures that are perceived to prey on each other for survival have been witnessed cooperating in times of need. Nothing in our current technology can duplicate such work. In the book of Job, God reminds us of how order, greatness, and beauty all come together in creation: "Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its size? Surely you know? Who stretched out the measuring line for it? Into what were its pedestals sunk, and who laid its cornerstone, while the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4-7). The book of Wisdom states that creation manifests God as the source of all this beauty and incomprehensible greatness, "For from the greatness and the beauty of created things their original author, by analogy, is seen" (Wis 13:5). These texts highlight the interdependence, harmony, and coexistence of all units of ecology and the planetary world. They illuminate God as Creator who sustains creation as a symphony of interdependence. Integral ecology reveals God who intelligently put everything together and aligned the purpose of each creature with the totality of all of creation. Such balance and order denote how God designed creation to adapt to each other as if dancing to the rhythm of life. Instead

of immersing ourselves in the masterpiece of God's creation, which affirms interdependence and relatedness, historical interpretations of creation have privileged humans and submitted to a peripheral reading of scriptural texts.

Feminist Recovery from an Anthropocentric Reading of Scripture

Integral ecology has a sublime message about the interdependence of creatures under one God. Central to the flourishing of creation is the Creator—ultimate source of life and love—sustaining the planet. Pope Francis expresses the wonder of creation and the abundance of relationships within it originates from God, “[t]he universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God.”¹³ The Creation accounts outline how God brought creatures to life systematically, reflecting natural order and systems. However, this harmonious vision has been overshadowed by anthropocentric interpretations that necessitate critical reevaluation.

The succession of creation, in which humans are the pinnacle of everything and the only bearers of *Imago Dei*, or God's image and likeness, has constructed exceptionalism in favor of humans. *Laudato Si'* rectifies this kind of interpretation by acknowledging that “each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness.”¹⁴ Scriptural interpretations that are anthropocentric endanger nonhuman lives by misconstruing them as of lesser value than humans. Integral ecology introduces a renewed way of looking at creation, one that shifts the traditional vantage point from humans at the center. Dennis Patrick O'Hara conveys that integral ecology reorders how

¹³ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 86.

¹⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 69.

creation is perceived. O'Hara decenters humans in creation, explaining that humans are just a part of the larger cosmology of life among other beings.¹⁵ In Creation accounts in Genesis, rich meanings signify that we share beauty with creation and co-create with it in God's household. The reiteration of every creature being "good" (Gn 1:3, 9, 12, 18, 21, 25), *tuv* in Hebrew, which is synonymous with beautiful, stresses how every part of creation inherently magnifies beauty.¹⁶ *Tuv* is like an indelible mark that is imprinted on each creature, originating from God's beauty, equally shared across the ecological family. The measure of the beauty of creation does not lie in what humans perceive as "greater" in value or worth, but in the goodness of God instilled in the whole creation. In Gn 1:31, the description becomes "very good" (*tuv me'od*) or "completely perfect," which reflects divine goodness where evil has no place in it.¹⁷ Thus, acts that exploit and belittle other creatures contradict God's original intent for creation. To be created in the image of God has a prerequisite of "stamping God's impression upon the rest of creation" (Ps 8).¹⁸ It can only be fulfilled by doing the serious work entailed by the term "subdue," or *kabats* (Gn 1:28),¹⁹ which calls us to serve creation not for our own sake, but for God's glory.²⁰ Similarly, in Genesis 2, humanity has the vocation to "till" and "keep," or *la-avod* (Gn 2:15), which means "to work"

¹⁵ Dennis Patrick O'Hara, "Reframing Ecotheological Anthropology within a More Integral Ecology" in *Integral Ecology for a Sustainable World*, ed. Dennis O'Hara, Matthew Eaton, and Michael T. Ross (Lexington Books, 2020), 148.

¹⁶ *The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008), I-53.

¹⁷ Ben Witherington III, *Torah Old and New: Exegesis, Intertextuality, and Hermeneutics* (Fortress Press, 2018), 41.

¹⁸ Witherington III, *Torah Old and New*, 40.

¹⁹ Witherington III, *Torah Old and New*, 40.

²⁰ Witherington III, *Torah Old and New*, 41.

or “to serve,” with a religious connotation that highlights our sacred duty to care for creation as its custodians.²¹

Dawn Nothwehr challenges the perceived boundaries and hierarchies in our relationship with creation by advocating obedience toward it that stems from the Franciscan theological tradition.²² Such a proposition disputes the conventional human-centered view of creation. Obedience to creation resists our tendency to feel superior to creation and urges us to listen, respond, and graciously offer ourselves to it. It therefore reconstructs the hierarchy between us and other creatures. Humans have been ordained to serve the whole creation in the spirit of stewardship—our divinely assigned role for the glorification of God. Serving creation does not mean that it is a passive agent that has no role in the upkeep of the planetary world.²³ Creation, as a living system, performs its role of sustaining the world. Rather than seeing creation as merely a resource, we can view it as our partner, with whom

²¹ *The Green Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, I-55-56.

²² Dawn M. Nothwehr, “Benedictine Responsibility and Franciscan Mutuality: Perspectives on the Relationship Between Humans and the Environment,” in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Dawn M. Nothwehr (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 408.

²³ One criticism of the stewardship model is that it assumes only humans, endowed with rationality, are capable of caring for creation, thereby systemically othering creation and rendering its contributions invisible in the process of sustaining our planet. Val Plumwood calls this “radical exclusion,” a culture rooted in anthropocentrism: “From an anthropocentric standpoint, nature is a hyper-separate lower order, lacking any real continuity with the human. This approach stresses heavily those features [for example, ‘rationality’] that make humans different from nature and animals, rather than those we share with them. Anthropocentric culture often endorses a view of the human as outside, and apart from, a plastic, passive, and ‘dead’ nature, which lacks agency and meaning.” See Daniel P. Horan, *All God’s Creatures: A Theology of Creation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2018), 61-62. The quote of Val Plumwood originally appeared in Val Plumwood, “Decolonisation Relationships with Nature,” *Philosophy Activism Nature*, no. 2 (2002): 10-11, <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.761776856886629>. Christopher Steck acknowledges the presence of anthropocentrism in Christian theology as inscribed in Scripture. However, to recover our mutual relationship we share with creation, he proposes the concept of “covenantal anthropocentrism,” which seeks to balance the privileged role of humans as custodians of creation within the human–God covenant with humanity’s moral responsibility toward, and mutuality with, the rest of creation. See Christopher Steck, *All God’s Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animal Ethics* (Georgetown University Press, 2019), 86.

we co-create the world through the intervention of God. *Laudato Si'* declares that “tilling” and “keeping” are shared duties of humanity and nature.²⁴ Further, stewardship, or *oikonomia* in Greek, conveys the concept that the world we live in is God’s household, which includes other creatures with whom we should cultivate and preserve the bounty of the earth.²⁵ Paramount to our survival is the belonging and thriving of nonhuman members of creation in God’s household. Integral ecology is an incisive framework that shifts our paradigm from a human-centered view to an inclusive web of relations often overlooked when addressing environmental issues.

Feminist theologians offer alternative metaphors to dismantle hierarchies and transcend our limited view of creation. Blood relations often influence how we treat one another. We tend to extend greater care and service to family than to strangers. In the same vein, the overemphasis on our distinctions from other creatures has led to the alienation and neglect of nonhuman lives. Feminist theologians reject hierarchical dualisms that subordinate nonhuman beings to stress the dignity of humans. Sallie McFague proposes an alternative interpretation of relationships between creatures, which alludes to the body that collectively represents all creatures and “unites us to each and every body on the planet; but as a justice or liberation model, it is of equal value.”²⁶ McFague frames her model with embodiment as a familiar experience and a universally accessible model. To come from the same matter as other creatures implies having the same design, value, and destiny. The body is composed of many parts, and yet every part coordinates with the others to achieve synchronicity. It is also

²⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 67.

²⁵ Horan, *All God’s Creatures*, 35.

²⁶ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Fortress Press, 1993), 18.

Paul's choice, as a metaphor for the Church as one body with many parts (1 Cor 12:12), to underscore the interconnectedness and equal dignity. Elizabeth Johnson views the relational coexistence and interdependence of all creatures as part of God's community, which she refers to as the *community paradigm*, where both humans and other creatures are in kinship, embodying God's goodness.²⁷ Community, as a metaphor, encourages envisioning creation as an integral relationship, which *Laudato Si'* calls *universal communion*, in which "all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect."²⁸ Saint Francis of Assisi's spirituality grounds this universal communion as the pillar of *Laudato Si'*'s foresight for all creation.

Gaia, or the Greek Earth Goddess, is the model that Rosemary Radford Ruether subscribes to as a feminist representation of the interdependence of the community of life—a critique of Western Christian traditions that have contributed to ecological destruction.²⁹ Ruether notes that the destruction of the earth is deeply rooted in the intersection of social structures such as gender, class, and race that systemically oppress women and nature.³⁰ Her model is cognizant of how the male God figure tends to reinforce patriarchal domination and destruction. Elizabeth Johnson argues that by assigning female symbols to God, it "challenges the idolatry of maleness in classic language about God, thereby making it possible the discovery of divine mystery, and points to recovery of the dignity of women

²⁷ Johnson, *Ask The Beasts*, 267–68.

²⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 89.

²⁹ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 4, 31.

³⁰ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 2.

created in the image of God.”³¹ Stretching our personification of God is neither tokenism for women nor sentimentalism about God. It expands our ability to reimagine God in ways that have been inhibited by the normative male characterization, which has limited how we relate to God. Recovering the female image of God informs us that women embody qualities of God and *vice versa*.

Building on these feminist reimagining of relationality, the image of the womb and umbilical cord symbolizes a natural connection—God being the mother as the source of life. McFague pictures God as a mother who gives birth and feeds her young, a powerful imagery of interrelatedness of life.³² This portrayal constitutes sharing the same blood and flesh with other creatures, with whom we share life and grow. Recognizing that we share more commonalities than differences with animals can alter how we perceive ourselves and our relationship with them.³³ Although the metaphor may appear anthropocentric, the womb and umbilical cord are universal symbols of life, dependence, and connection across species. This imagery resonates with the incarnational metaphor of Fulata Lusungu Moyo inspired by the indigenous Malawian ritual of burying the umbilical cord into the ground that represents humans' dependence on the planet for survival.³⁴ Although Moyo visualizes the buried umbilical cord as a lifeline for human sustenance, which echoes the same narrative as that of

³¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse (Twenty-fifth Anniversary edition)* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 47.

³² Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Fortress Press, 1987), 100–101.

³³ In Chapter 2, I will discuss how *entangled empathy*, as an ethical framework, encourages us to be more judicious in simply honoring the similarities between ourselves and animals and completely disregarding their uniqueness, which is a practice of anthropocentrism.

³⁴ Fulata Lusungu Moyo, “‘Ukugqiba Inkaba’—Burying the Umbilical Cord: An African Indigenous Ecofeminist Perspective on Incarnation” in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women’s Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster (Augsburg Fortress, 2017), 184–185. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwt42b.15>.

creation accounts, the act of connecting oneself with the rest of creation through this ritual is a deliberate stance that emanates from a willful desire to belong and identify with creation. It reimagines a kinship that establishes a pact with the whole ecological family. While being nourished by the planet, it can also mean offering self-giving love, care, and service to the entire creation through stewardship. This metaphor challenges traditional hierarchies between creatures and offers new images of God that instill a sense of relational belonging, rather than domination. The concept of integral ecology dismantles the hierarchy between humans and the rest of creation. Hierarchies, which raise humans to a grand stature, have produced attitudes that promote the exploitation of nonhuman creatures. Perceiving nonhuman creatures as different from us in terms of value creates forms of alienation. A horizontal relationship implies equal belonging, which can only arise from an embodied, communal, filial, and relational kinship. The image of the womb, where all lives have been formed, challenges hierarchies and exceptionalisms that erase the symbiotic relationships shared by the ecological family.

These rich, embodied images of integral ecology demonstrate that ecological deterioration is not separate from broader systems of injustice. It indicates that anthropogenic activities result in multi-layered repercussions. The abuse of the natural world, including animals, has caused fractured natural equilibrium, socio-economic disparities, displacement of communities, the death of species, and neglect of the human vocation of stewardship. Therefore, an integral ecology approach to addressing environmental issues such as animal abuse must always consider social, political, and economic dimensions as constantly interacting attributes.

The Case of Laika, the Space Dog

As previously discussed, hierarchical dualisms have a profound effect on our perception of nonhuman beings. The embodied metaphors of integral ecology prompt us to envision creation, particularly animals, as kin and not as resources to be exploited by our selfish ambitions. *Laudato Si'* underscores that animals “have value in themselves,”³⁵ they “give glory to God by their very existence,”³⁶ and “must be cherished with love and respect.”³⁷ Unfortunately, animals have been senselessly used to advance human progress. The story of Laika,³⁸ the Soviet space dog (the first living being to orbit the earth), captures how systemic structures of science, politics, and patriarchy intersect to instrumentalize nonhuman life. The Soviet launch of Sputnik 2 in 1957 illustrates this tragic dynamic.³⁹ The Cold War formed the backdrop for the intensive expansion of space exploration in the 1950s between the United States and the USSR, during which competition for military influence and power reached new heights.⁴⁰ The spacecraft carried Laika, the space dog, on a one-way trip that ended her life. Once a stray fending for herself on the streets of Moscow, space

³⁵ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 33.

³⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 33.

³⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 42.

³⁸ Laika's original Russian name was “Kudrjavka/Kudryavka” (Кудрявка), which means Little Curly in reference to her fur. See Matthew Wills, “Laika: The First Earthling in Space,” JSTOR Daily, October 22, 2014, <https://daily.jstor.org/laika-the-dog/>. “Laika” means barker, which originated from the bark she responded with when she was interviewed on Radio Moscow the night before her departure. Tijana Vujosevic deciphers that her bark meant wanting to express a desire to speak and be communicative the way humans do. It implies her desire to connect, to be in affinity, and to be like humans. See Vujosevic, “Homage to the Sad Space Bitch,” 153.

³⁹ Vujosevic, “Homage to the Sad Space Bitch,” 148–157.

⁴⁰ Andrew S. Erickson, “Revisiting the U.S.-Soviet Space Race: Comparing Two Systems in Their Competition to Land a Man on the Moon,” *Acta Astronautica* 148 (2018): 377, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actaastro.2018.04.053>.

scientists brought Laika to a laboratory. They trained her to become an unwilling participant in a state project, presented under the guise of progress. She was chosen precisely for the experimental mission because of her submissive and docile traits, which would make her well-suited to the harsh conditions of the spacecraft. Even her being a female dog was an intentional choice, as female animals' waste disposal was more manageable to deal with,⁴¹ and their anatomy was more suited for close confinement.⁴² Her fragility, docility, and vulnerability were all determining factors that made her the ideal subject for the experiment. Before her flight, she was taken by Vladimir Yazdovsky, a space scientist, into his home to play with his children, making her last hours a "positive" experience. Patti White's poem "Laika" vividly captures the tragedy of Laika during the space experimentation where she once again became a stray. This time, there was no more chance at life as she was sent into oblivion, containing all the pain. Only the atmosphere was the witness to her agonizing cries.

Laika⁴³

Half-breed husky from the streets of Moscow, Siberian stray, mongrel, Soviet space girl with sweet dark eyes, muttnik, star punch, she trembles in her baffled capsule, barks, shivers as the rocket rises over the Aral Sea, *babushkas* beneath her. Red Square a flea on the pelt of Russia, barks, barks. Words cannot express her fear; a dog, she has no words.

When engine stalls and falls silent, it is as if words no longer exist in the universe. Shot through with stray photons, Laika's capsule sparkles, crackles, as sun barks against the aluminum skin of her kennel. The Red Star decal near the hatch dims as her homeland spins beneath the horizon, darkens, disappears. When the moon shivers

in her tiny window, its howling light shatters into shivers of glass against glass, breaks into lines like brittle words warning her that the cold waits outside, a wolf

⁴¹ Wills, "Laika: The First Earthling in Space."

⁴² Robert Lewis, "Laika," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, December 13, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/animal/Laika>.

⁴³ Patti White, "Laika," *The North American Review* 290, no. 2 (2005): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25127363>.

beneath the solar wind. She orbits the earth, circling like a stray, cycling through
dawns the lap her face, the sun a star-dog greeting her, leaping, wagging, flaming.
Laika barks

eagerly, seeking comfort, squirming in her harness, barks like a mad dog, strains
to escape the wires, moans, shivers in frustration, whines. Khrushchev in his *dacha*
sees her star pass overhead, but Laika no longer sees the earth; the words of praise
cannot reach her, and she is only a Moscow stray adrift in the universe. She
dreams, not of the world beneath

her tumbling craft, but of galaxies like fields of snow beneath Siberian skies,
sparked with sun, echoing with the barks of abandoned dogs, of comets
wandering the streets, stray moons finding shelter in the Kremlin, imagines the
shivers of discovery, the scent of planets whose names are words untranslatable
in human language. Her mottled fur, star-

spangled, shines in spacelight until she falls, a star streaking across the Russian
night so far beneath her, her ears pricked as if to hear, at last, kind words
welcoming her inside. The gleaming cabin whines, barks edges off the sky,
returns to earth, a cinder that shivers and splinters in the atmosphere, a small sun
astray.

Sweet Laika, the dog-star. The echoes of her barks ring softly beneath a lingering
moon as she shivers, speaking canine words whose meaning does not stray.

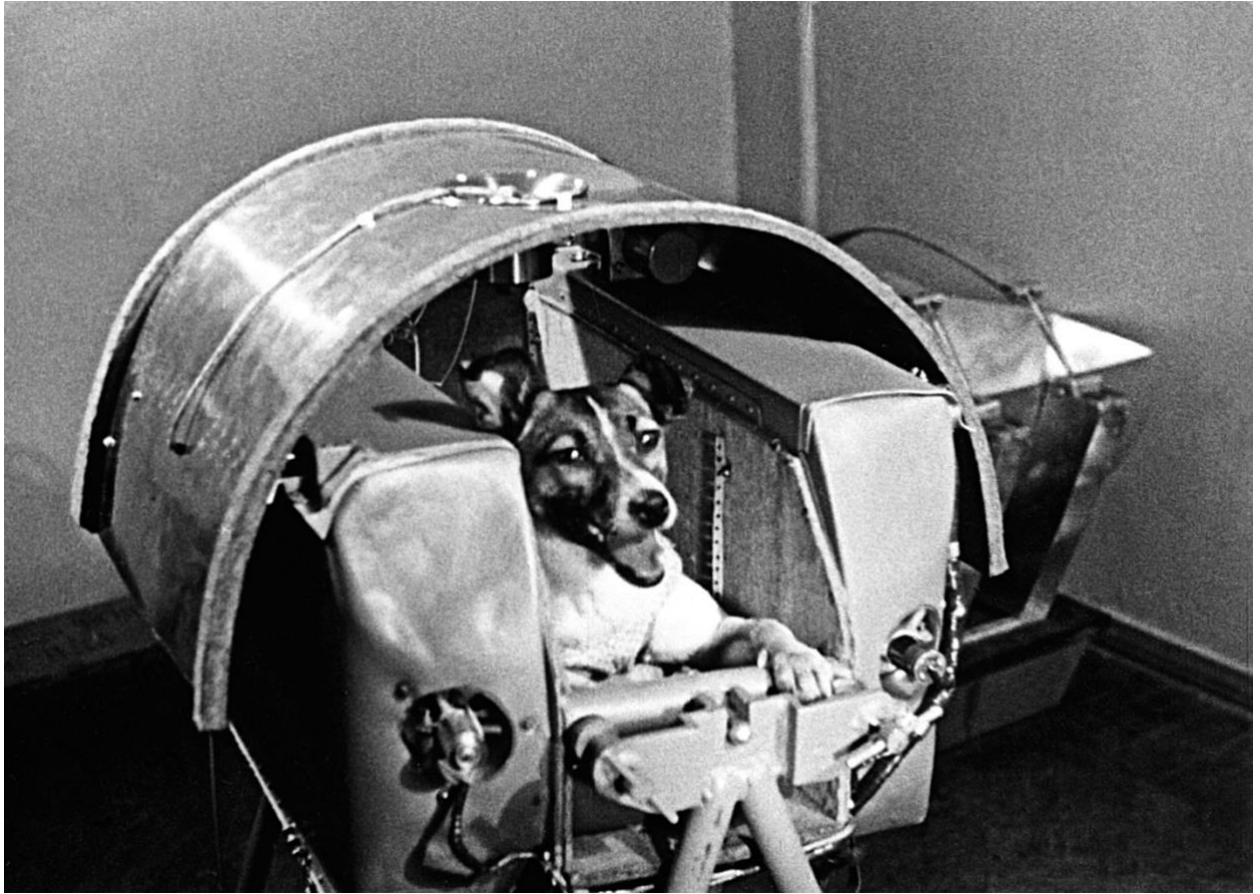


Fig. 1.1. Laika positioned in a mock-up of the space capsule during her training⁴⁴

The story of Laika is the tragic fate of an innocent animal, framed as a symbol of scientific advancement and national pride. The scientists exploited her submissive and calm traits for human ends. She was given food, shelter, and briefly shown affection, only to be abandoned in her final moments. Her stray life was a lot better than being taken into custody by humans. She depended on them only to be brought to death in the end. The home and

⁴⁴ Citing Alex Wellerstein, “Remembering Laika, Space Dog and Soviet Hero,” *The New Yorker*, November 3, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/remembering-laika-space-dog-and-soviet-hero>. This is the calm before the storm, where Laika seems happy, strapped in a mock-up of the space capsule, unaware of the full picture of the voyage. Her relaxed disposition must have been a sign of her being comfortable around the space scientists training her. We could imagine what was going on in her mind at this very moment.

family she had briefly enjoyed were gestures of temporary appeasement for the tragic fate she would be put in.

Nothing can justify the death of Laika—it was an outright act of animal violence to prove the superiority of the Soviet Union to other nations in space exploration. *Laudato Si'* cautions against such advancements that endanger animals and calls us to have “honesty needed to question certain models of development, production, and consumption.”⁴⁵ The scientific advancement rhetoric employed by the Soviets was a patriarchal mode of domination. Laika was the collateral of their nationalistic project. Elizabeth Johnson critiques how the dominion paradigm, rooted in flawed biblical interpretations, has led to humanity overusing its capacity to exercise dominion over nature and nonhuman lives, resulting in a heavy exploration and pursuit of mastery of the world through technological advancements imbued with patriarchy, similar to the Soviets’ space conquest that involved Laika. Johnson opines:

The effective history of the dominion paradigm through the centuries shows its ambiguity, insofar as it is wide open to readings that promote human self-interest at nature’s expense. It has certainly been used, explicitly and implicitly, as an ideological justification for exploitative practices. Such a reading became especially ascendant in the modern era, when new methods of scientific investigation coupled with industrial development, new technologies, and global trade for profit promoted the idea that men close (I use the word advisedly) have the right to master the natural world the fact that there might be a cost to nature itself was passed over in silence.⁴⁶

Several members of the Soviet space exploration team were Christians. They may not have consciously subscribed to the same paradigm. However, their agenda still reflects the patriarchal logic of science that insists on supremacy through conquest of uninhabited

⁴⁵ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 138.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Ask The Beasts*, 265.

terrains such as space. Scientific realms assert dominance for their biases for control, experimentation, extraction, and militarism. Patriarchal logics, such as this, entangle humans and animals, making animals victims of human dominance. By the same token, *Laudato Si's technocratic paradigm* dissuades us from unreasonable dependence on technology and scientific imports as “a technique of possession, mastery and transformation”⁴⁷ that is imminent in humans declaring “lordship over all.”⁴⁸ Science, for all its benefits, can drive human development. Still, the overuse of it inevitably seeks out power that has profound impacts on vulnerable members of the ecological family. Corollary to this, Laika's natural submissiveness and resilience, meant for kinship relations with other creatures, were exploited by the scientists as a means for destructive scientific practices. It was a betrayal of the filial relationship they should have shown to Laika, who was a dog in need of care and protection. The likes of Laika—small dogs used for space experimentation—developed dependence on the experimenters to the point of being cooperative with them, even though the painful processes involved in the experimentation.⁴⁹ Laika became close to research assistant Yelena Dubrovsky during the experiment.⁵⁰ Tijana Vujosevic remarks that Laika was kin to humans—capable of displaying emotional union with them through her voice, gaze, and touch—close enough to being human. Yet her potential for affinity was trampled by the Soviet state through the instrumentalization of Laika for political aspirations. Her relationship with humans and

⁴⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 106.

⁴⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 108.

⁴⁹ Amy Nelson, “What the Dogs Did: Animal Agency in the Soviet Manned Space Flight Programme,” *BJHS Themes* 2 (January 1, 2017): 96, <https://doi.org/10.1017/bjt.2017.9>.

⁵⁰ Herman, “Multispecies Storyworlds,” 135.

animals alike was prematurely punctuated. Vujosevic refers to this betrayal of kinship with Laika as *akinship*, a relationship between humans and nonhuman species grounded in a hegemonic agenda that capitalizes on animals. Vujosevic writes:

But the central thing that made the Dog [Laika] kin, what made her more than biological kin, was that she was *kontaktnaya*, capable of contact, social, communicative. That she was the embodiment of the main lure and mystery of the companion animal: her capacity to make connections or establish contact, to move human hearts with her gaze, touch, and voice...⁵¹ “Akinship,” the relationship between Man and non-Man that was at the center of the Soviet Space Dog narrative, was a hegemonic relationship in which the animal, Man’s imperfect and sad copy, was colonized and abused. And it was also a mythical, even sacral relationship in which this beast was launched into the heavens as Man’s envoy, as the encapsulation of Man’s aspiration, his image in the firmament. One cannot overlook that “akinship” resembles a pre-modern, totemistic relationship between Man and the beast, understood as his kin.⁵²

The case of Laika is critiqued for the subjugation of nonhuman life to drive narratives of geopolitical ambitions, scientific experimentation, and cosmic conquest. Laika’s severed bond was a rupture in our kinship with creation. Unfortunately, at one point in history, animals sent into space was a celebrated project and treated as a major contribution to human survival.⁵³

***Laudato Si*’s Ambiguities about Animal Treatment**

Laudato Si’ certainly is a departure from the deficient dominion paradigm that oppresses animals, and yet it is still marked by ambiguities as to how we should treat

⁵¹ Vujosevic, “Homage to the Sad Space Bitch,” 152-153.

⁵² Vujosevic, “Homage to the Sad Space Bitch,” 155.

⁵³ A U.S. article from 1961 notes that over 15,000 animals were made to participate annually in space research. This number is shocking to comprehend. Most of the animals in these experiments were abducted, unnamed, and isolated. Yet the article frames the animals as heroic beings for assisting humans. See “Animals Pioneer in Space,” *The Science News-Letter* 79, no. 1 (1961): 10–11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3943238>.

animals. It still upholds the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which states that using animals is morally acceptable when the benefit is “within reasonable limits [and] contributes to caring for or saving human lives.”⁵⁴ This tension creates uncertainties about the overlap between the utilitarian function of nonhuman creatures and their inherent dignity. While *Laudato Si'* envisions universal communion for all creation, its moral framework remains anthropocentric, supporting animal use to ensure human survival. Such perplexity allows scientific practices involving animals to be permissible and not morally confronted on a larger scale. Feminist science scholar Donna Haraway refers to this entanglement as *naturecultures*,⁵⁵ which rejects the dichotomy between nature and culture, emphasizing that humans, nonhuman beings, and their environments constitute relations that shape their relational existence. Upon closer examination, *naturecultures* conveys a similar message with integral ecology, highlighting the inseparable outcomes of destruction within the mutual relationships in all creation. Haraway discerns the philosophical mutual constitutive relations of humans and animals in the context of science, saying that “[d]ogs are not an alibi for other themes; dogs are freshly material-semiotic presences in the body of technoscience. Dogs are not surrogates for theory; they are not here just to think with. They are here to live with.”⁵⁶ Haraway impeccably nuances that animals are not simply ancillary bodies to assist us in enriching our lives through scientific and philosophical innovations, but they are corporeally present in our lives to be our companions.

⁵⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec.130.

⁵⁵ Donna J. Haraway, “The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness,” in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Scholarship Online, 2017), 100–102, <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816650477.003.0002>.

⁵⁶ Haraway, “The Companion Species Manifesto,” 98.

Laika's demise cannot be confused with anything else, as it was clearly a case of animal abuse. However, there are still activities involving animals that are in a moral gray area. Animals continue to be brought into laboratories for testing and biomedical research to benefit humans, which is profited by industries such as cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and chemicals. Animals also extend human life, with their organs used for transplantation. The consumption of meat is a topic of ongoing debate among scholars, ethicists, and stakeholders. Nevertheless, the unchecked overconsumption of meat and unethical methods of killing animals must be reevaluated. The overbreeding of animals and genetic manipulation for animal domestication continue to increase. These tensions between utilitarian purposes and the rights and dignity of animals are hidden from view. If noticed, they are brushed off with reasons that privilege human life. Therefore, the concept of integral ecology must critically contemplate ecological conversion that authentically settles ambiguities and ambivalence about universal communion. To practice ecological conversion is to completely affirm that our animal counterparts must never be a means for any human ends—this should be unconditional and not subject to negotiation.

The War Continues

The Cold War was succeeded by many other wars in history that may not have launched animals into space, but have progressively inflicted suffering on humans, animals, and the entire ecological family. Within the writing period (January 2025–May 2026) of this thesis-project, the war between Israel and Palestine has brought massive destruction to human communities and ecosystems in the region. The conflict in the Middle East has further intensified as the United States has provided support for Israel amid regional tensions

involving Iran. For every launched missile, lives are lost, terror increases, and homes—both built and natural—are destroyed. The displacement of all lives has destabilized communities. The missile attacks on oil facilities in Iran have posed a threat to ecosystems, including animals on land and sea.⁵⁷ Studies show that war impacts animals,—domestic⁵⁸ and wild⁵⁹—their habitats, and ecosystems that often leave long-term outcomes.⁶⁰ War inevitably disturbs human-animal relations and thwarts the lives of the new generations of Laikas. For instance, in Dubai, it has been observed that many companion animals (i.e., dogs and cats) were abandoned by their expat human companions as the latter fled to their home countries.⁶¹ A similar incident happened during the imminent occupation of Kabul by the Taliban in 2021, where dogs and cats were caught in uncertain times.⁶² During the war between Russia and

⁵⁷ “Operation Epic Fury: Emerging Environmental Harm and Risks in Iran and the Region.” Conflict and Environment Observatory, March 2026, <https://ceobs.org/operation-epic-fury-emerging-environmental-harm-and-risks-in-iran-and-the-region/>.

⁵⁸ Mariia Martsiv et al., “Dogs of War: The Effect of War-Inflicted Environmental Damage on Free-Ranging Domestic Dogs,” *Evolutionary Applications* 18, no. 12 (December 1, 2025): 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1111/eva.70182>.

⁵⁹ Joseph P. Dudley et al., “Effects of War and Civil Strife on Wildlife and Wildlife Habitats,” *Conservation Biology* 16, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 319–27, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1523-1739.2002.00306.x>.

⁶⁰ Most studies that explore war focus on human lives. Scholarship on the impact of war on the environment is still growing. Even after the ceasefire, the strife continues to affect the land. See, for example, Florian Krampe, Joakim Kreutz, and Tobias Ide, “Armed Conflict Causes Long-lasting Environmental Harms,” *Environment and Security* 4, no. 1 (March 11, 2025): 3–13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/27538796251323739>; Hailemariam Meaza et al., “Managing the Environmental Impacts of War: What Can Be Learned From Conflict-vulnerable Communities?” *The Science of the Total Environment* 927 (March 27, 2024): 2-10, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2024.171974>; Joseph P. Hupy, “The Long-term Effects of Explosive Munitions on the WWI Battlefield Surface of Verdun, France,” *Scottish Geographical Journal* 122, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 167–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00369220618737264>.

⁶¹ “Israel-Iran War: Dogs Tied, Kittens Left in Boxes, Heartbreaking Crisis Unfolds on Dubai Streets as Expats Flee UAE,” *The Economic Times*, March 9, 2026, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/new-updates/israel-iran-war-dogs-tied-kittens-left-in-boxes-heartbreaking-crisis-unfolds-on-dubai-streets-as-expats-flee-uae/articleshow/129328401.cms?from=mdr>.

⁶² Josh Milburn and Sara Van Goozen, “Animals and the Ethics of War: A Call for an Inclusive Just-war Theory,” *International Relations* 37, no. 3 (August 5, 2023): 423, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178231191297>.

Ukraine, companion animals were also entangled in the fleeing of Ukrainian refugees.⁶³ Abandonment of companion animals is indeed animal abuse, which is a violation of the law in other countries. However, local and international transport of animals is a complex process that requires time, paperwork, laboratory tests, and financial costs.⁶⁴ It is already a burdensome process on ordinary days, more so in a time of war. War weapons have negative effects on the health of companion animals. In a study conducted on stray dogs in Ukraine, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, the dogs' physiological traits were affected severely, exhibiting bodies with low BMI due to malnutrition, enduring injuries, and an overall alteration of their phenotypic characteristics.⁶⁵ Like in previous wars, animals who perform roles (e.g. bomb/explosive detection, animal-assisted therapy, transport, security) in war-stricken regions are implicated with emotional and physical conditions.⁶⁶ Josh Milburn and Sara Van Goozen urge stakeholders to consider how Just War Theory⁶⁷ might apply to

⁶³ Milburn and Van Goozen, "Animals and the Ethics of War," 424.

⁶⁴ I have firsthand experience transporting a companion animal. In 2024, I brought Pancake from Manila to the United States, which entailed several months of preparing her paperwork. She underwent laboratory tests and was required to be revaccinated against rabies after having a microchip implanted, which served as her unique identification. Upon arriving in the United States, she received another anti-rabies shot as an additional precaution. The process of transporting companion animals abroad from less developed countries is complex, as countries are typically categorized according to the prevalence of rabies. While this system protects public health and animal welfare, it often overlooks economic inequalities and the risks imposed on animals. The regulation of companion animal transport can reflect a Western-centered and anthropocentric approach to zoonotic health and border regimes.

⁶⁵ Martsiv et al., "Dogs of War," 1-17.

⁶⁶ Ukrainian dogs engaged in providing therapeutic interventions to military personnel are exposed to stress; see Sandra Foltin et al., "War Exposure and Canine Cortisol Responses: Country Differences in Cortisol Profiles of Therapy Dogs," *Animals* 16, no. 3 (January 25, 2026): 381, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani16030381>. Military dogs in Colombia that detect landmines have developed cutaneous leishmaniasis; see Lina Pinto-García, "Military Dogs and Their Soldier Companions: The More-than-human Biopolitics of Leishmaniasis in Conflict-torn Colombia," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (February 2, 2022): 237-53, <https://doi.org/10.1111/maq.12694>.

⁶⁷ Just War Theory is commonly associated with the writings of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. In *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas outlines the conditions for a just war: legitimate authority, just cause, and right intention. See Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, II-II. q. 40.

animals, emphasizing that the ethics of war should extend beyond humans.⁶⁸ Yet again, this is another narrative of how patriarchal logics, dualism, and scientific warfare are wielded to achieve geopolitical power, making animal lives alongside human life collateral damage.



Fig. 1.2. An injured cat navigates rubble in Haret Hreik, Beirut, Lebanon, in the aftermath of an Israeli airstrike on March 9, 2026.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Milburn and Van Goozen, “Animals and the Ethics of War,” 441.

⁶⁹ AFP, *A stray cat seeks its way amidst the rubble at the site of an Israeli airstrike in Beirut*, March 9, 2026, photograph, Gulf News, March 17, 2026, <https://gulfnews.com/opinion/op-eds/the-silent-victims-of-war-when-pets-are-left-behind-1.500477633>.

Ecological Conversion

Pope John Paul II first introduced the term *ecological conversion* to the Catholic Church. He noted that ecological conversion is the awakening of humanity's moral awareness of the impending loss of habitats and the significance of restoring the foundation of human ecology to “make the existence of creatures more dignified.”⁷⁰ Pope John Paul II had a vision of the relational dimension of creation and the intersectional repercussions of the absence of responsible stewardship. Pope Francis, on the other hand, further developed the depth of ecological conversion by framing it within our relationship with Jesus Christ as a model for how we should forge relationships with other creatures.

Our encounter with God is the benchmark for how we must act as stewards. Such a model sounds very plausible, but in reality, not everyone has the spiritual aptitude or consciousness that would readily motivate them to see God in their connection with creation and consequently care for it. In the absence of a developed relationship with God, ecological conversion must stem from a profound relationship with creation, which will animate a strong desire to tend to it and ultimately lead to a meaningful relationship with God.

Sacramentality of Ecological Conversion

Ecological conversion is a commitment to care for creation as a fruit of our relationship with God. Being loved and cared for by God is the primary motivator of giving love back to the whole creation as our family. A relationship with God is not always available in the spiritual compartment of every person. Some people do not believe in God. Others did not have the opportunity to cultivate their faith within a household or a religious

⁷⁰ John Paul II, “General Audience Address,” The Holy See, January 17, 2001, sec. 4, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117.html.

community through faith formation. And there are other possible reasons why one might not have a personal relationship with God. What else can be the foundation for ecological conversion if one has not cultivated a friendship with God in any shape or form, or if one has not fully embraced the vision of community of life in creation through faith?

One may not have the right circumstances or readiness to form a bond with God through faith, but creation can aid in this process. Creation itself, as a manifesting and enriching presence of God, has the power to touch the heart of each of us, teaching us to connect and love one another. These relational capacities spring from the richness of God's love. Our encounter with creation is sacramental—creation reveals God, leading us to believe that God, or something greater than us, is real, present, and in charge of our lives. Creation mediates the invisible God. Theologians and saints spoke about how creation sacramentally reveals God to us. Augustine candidly inquires about God through the sun, the moon, and the stars, and they reply, “neither are we the God whom you seek...[but] it is he who has made us.”⁷¹ Saint Francis contemplates how creatures—whom he considers as kin—mirror the divine in a lived and affective way in his poetic expression of the *Canticle of Brother Sun*.⁷² Irenaeus of Lyons correlates the order of the cosmos to the Creator,⁷³ revelatory of God's maintaining of the harmonious movement of the elements. In the First Principle and Foundation of Saint Ignatius of Loyola in the *Spiritual Exercises*, he describes creation as a

⁷¹ Augustine, *Confessions, Volume II: Books 9–13*, trans. William Watts, Loeb Classical Library 27 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1912), 10.6.9.

⁷² Francis of Assisi, *The Canticle of the Creatures*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Volume 1: The Saint*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York: New City Press, 1999), 113.

⁷³ Payton, “Exposing Heresy,” 46.

sacramental gift of God's presence and a means to know, praise, and reverence God.⁷⁴ The intervention of creation as a revelatory agent of God or the divine occurs when we strive to be one with nature. Jane Goodall, a primatologist and anthropologist renowned for her groundbreaking work with chimpanzees in Africa, felt a deep connection with the "spiritual power" whenever she was close to animals and nature.⁷⁵ Interestingly, she would greet animals like friends, a practice she adopted from Saint Francis of Assisi, her favorite saint.⁷⁶ Gina Lopez, a Filipino philanthropist and environmentalist, kept herself grounded by nature noting that her affinity with it is a gateway to experiencing the divine.⁷⁷ She dedicated her life to alleviating the lives of people, especially those who are on the margins, through responsible environmental projects and policies that would improve their lives. We can access ecological conversion by paying attention to how creation directs and moves us. It can be our teacher in understanding truths about ourselves, creation, and God. Being close to nature may not automatically orient us to the presence of God. Still, nature has a special way to make us contemplate our existence and acknowledge that there is someone greater governing everything in creation.

⁷⁴ St. Ignatius Of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph* (Loyola Press, 2009).

⁷⁵ Jane Goodall and Phillip Berman, *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey* (New York: Warner Books, 1999), 72.

⁷⁶ Goodall and Berman, *Reason for Hope*, 73.

⁷⁷ Momar G. Visaya, "Celebrating the Beautiful and Memorable Life of Gina Lopez," Asian Journal News, August 21, 2019, <https://asianjournal.com/life-style/arts-culture/celebrating-the-beautiful-and-memorable-life-of-gina-lopez/>.

Ecological Conversion and Ministry through an Ecofeminist Lens

Ecological conversion is a necessary part of restoring the integrity of creation. Creation has been maligned in egregious ways and thus requires healing. Crucial to its healing is examining the relationships that received the brunt of the damage, asking ourselves who we have pained to attain our aspirations for progress and satiation. Ecological conversion invites us to look inward to identify erroneous notions on our relationship with other creatures. *Laudato Si'* recognizes this introspection as a form of reconciliation with creation that intervenes to repair the wound we have contributed to the environment.⁷⁸ It also encourages us to look outward to determine the structures and systems that we sustain and reproduce, which oppress and denigrate our fellow humans and other creatures.

However, Agnes Brazal argues that *Laudato Si'* fails to integrate a gender lens into its analysis of environmental justice, whereby it “does not critique the patriarchal home/family that is normative in many societies.”⁷⁹ From a postcolonial ecofeminist lens, Brazal critiques how care has been traditionally relegated to women even if it should be everybody’s ecological virtue.⁸⁰ Reuther believes that to bring healing to creation, it demands structural change that pays attention to gender, class, and race to foster eco-justice that seeps into individual and institutional relationships:

If dominating and destructive relations to the earth are interrelated with gender, class, and racial domination, then a healed relation to the earth cannot come about simply through technological “fixes.” It demands a social reordering to bring about just and loving interrelationship between men and women, between races and nations, between groups presently stratified into social classes, manifest in great disparities of access to the means of life. In

⁷⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 218.

⁷⁹ Agnes M. Brazal, “Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si'*: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique,” *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (May 2021): 224, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000614>.

⁸⁰ Brazal, “Ethics of Care,” 226.

short, it demands that we must speak eco-justice, and not simply domination of the earth as though that happened unrelated to social domination.⁸¹

Ruether's holistic approach, which focuses on intersectional and structural changes, aligns with Denis Edwards' ecological conversion. Edwards posits that the Church must side with the poor, women, and the suffering creation and urges for the participation of all, not just those who belong to the Church.⁸² These positions affirm that ecological conversion requires altering the ways we position power, in such a way that we level the unequal power relations inherent in gender, class, and racial structures so that the oppressed can also flourish. Ecological conversion, in its essence, demands a permanent, relationship-based, and transformative change. It must be everyone's vocation that bridges us back to creation and God. If it is a vocation, it must be part of our commitment to heal our home by respecting relationships—ensuring that we equalize power asymmetries and challenge structures that widen them.

Applying the assertions of Brazal, Ruether, and Edwards to ministry, it is necessary that power relations shaped by gender, class, race, and other identities be attended to. This fortifies a ministry that is conscious of not just providing band-aid ministry work, but one that also attempts to dismantle unjust systems that oppress those involved. In the context of this thesis-project, the relationship between Filipino single women and companion animals is not a visible ministry, yet it deserves to be honored as it reveals how the care work of these women, amidst their own marginalization, contributes to the causes of animals. Despite the limitations in exploring how other gender identities participate in ecological endeavors, this

⁸¹ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 2-3.

⁸² Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 3.

work contributes a benchmark for human-animal ministry. By doing so, we gain rich insights into how ministry should be practiced on the ground by *everyone*.

Saving Laika: Ministry of Woman-Animal Companionship

As suggested earlier, ecological conversion as a ministry framework must be extended to encompass the multiple intersecting realities of women. In the context of the Philippines, care work is traditionally designated to women, but is oftentimes hidden from view. With the changing dynamics of humans and animals in the Philippines, with companion animals significantly increasing as integral members of the home, the care work for companion animals becomes part of their work. Many single women take on this responsibility willingly because of their perceived ‘calling’ to do it, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. Several of them have adopted or rescued stray animals like Laika. Thus, it is imperative that this relationship be examined to draw reflection on how ministry may look like if it is multispecies, reciprocal, homegrown, non-hierarchical, and unstructured.

Now, it is good to look at how ministry is defined, then contrast it with the ministry praxis of single women for companion animals. The definition of ministry is nuanced by various perspectives on authority, representation, and divine giftedness. Paul Avis argues that ministry must be “the performance of word, sacrament, and pastoral care” and not self-realized but rather “essential to the church’s life and mission.”⁸³ This definition ingrains the threefold ministry of Christ—prophetic, priestly, and kingly—and the divine calling for the determination of one’s ministry. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

⁸³ Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 49, ProQuest Ebook Central.

(USCCB) published a document in 2005 titled *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, which outlines the foundation and nature of the work of lay ministers. The document stipulates that lay ministers work in conjunction with ordained ministers and the Church to complement the threefold ministry of Christ, rooted in their baptismal call and the gifts they have received. Often, the people who become lay ministers undergo training and authorization of competent authority.⁸⁴ In a similar fashion, the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* describes ministry as a public act of doing something good for the Kingdom of God on behalf of the Church arising from our baptismal gifts.⁸⁵ With these definitions, ministry is a God-given task of serving the Church as a response to the needs of God's people; to perform accordingly, the Spirit empowers the minister with baptismal grace. These definitions conceive ministry as a calling from God, rooted in the mission of the Church, and formalized through training and commissioning. It is intrinsically hierarchical, structured, and lacks emphasis on reciprocity.

Oddly enough, ministry often involves human-to-human contact through attending to the needs of individuals or groups within our community. Ecological conversion serves as a reiteration that we are not only accountable to our fellow humans but also to the creatures who are an integral part of our lives. Ministering to marginalized human sectors is a noble calling, but we must also give significant attention to caring for animals as part of the larger practice of ecological conversion. Caring for animals, specifically human-animal companionship, is rightfully a ministry that bears the spirituality of ecological conversion

⁸⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 11-12.

⁸⁵ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: ECCCE, 1997), sec. 1420.

and the biblical meaning of *la-avod* (Gn 2:15). Human-animal companionship has the potential to transform us spiritually and environmentally. Chapter 6 will shed light on how caring for animals can enrich our spiritual and environmental development. Being enriched by companion animals indicates that this ministry praxis is not one-sided, but co-constitutive, where both parties benefit. However, this reality is not widely recognized because of our anthropocentric assumptions about animals, whom we often believe to be incapable of responding to us. This will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

This research work primarily focuses on caring for companion animals as a means of practicing ecological conversion. Having a companion animal is a great way to be with animals and witness the larger world through their eyes. The work of environmentalists is truly admirable, but ecological conversion as a ministry can begin in the home, then expand. In fact, home is the primary locale of care where one first learns to empathize with the other.⁸⁶ Moreover, not everyone can easily access animals in the wild and learn from them about the interrelatedness of all life. Ruether argues that having pets or companion animals is “the main arena where urban humans experience interspecies love and communication and come to recognize personhood of animals.”⁸⁷ Being in contact with them, we can come to understand their behavior, language, needs, and desires in proximity to our own set of values and questions. They prime us to rethink how to channel love toward nonhuman species—maybe slightly different in expression but still of the same essence. Without forcing having a close relationship with animals, human-animal companionship may be one of the most accessible ways to forge a connection with them. Human-animal companionship should not

⁸⁶ Brazal, “Ethics of Care,” 222.

⁸⁷ Ruether, *Gaia & God*, 219.

be confused with using animals to an end, which is anthropocentric and morally wrong. However, human-animal companionship, without leading to the compulsive and unethical domestication of animals, can bridge the distance between humans and animals. The experience can reshape the way we relate to them. Laika represents the need for animals to have a safe and secure home, most especially, in times of displacement, abandonment, and neglect. She prematurely died but could have lived happy years in a loving home had the people who took her in been more compassionate. It takes a closer encounter with animals to understand and appreciate them. By becoming familiar with how animals act, respond, and connect with us, we realize that they are far more than we initially perceived. This ministry can help us unlearn our persuasive biases for human exceptionalism that are severely entrenched in how we treat animals.

Ministries involving animals are being conducted, but they are not generally well-known or widely embraced within the Church. Inspecting the definitions of ministry, human-animal companionship does not fulfill the prerequisites of the pastoral notion of ministry. First, human-animal companionship is not an organized activity within the Church where human companions are equipped or prepared for this ministry. Second, many people who serve as human companions are not necessarily aware that their role is considered a ministry. Individuals who care for companion animals do so because of their love for animals. Thus, being *chosen* for this call is not something premeditated or commissioned by authority; in other words, it is self-initiated. Third, many individuals who labor in this compassionate work do not necessarily come from a religious background. Faced with these problems, how can we delineate human-animal companionship as a ministry praxis from what the Church hopes to envision ministry to be? Does this ministry praxis provide us with a new meaning of

ministry that encompasses ecological conversion? The traditional definitions of ministry, shaped by anthropocentric structures, must also evolve to encompass relational service to all creation.

Currently, some ministries advocate for the welfare of animals. In the United States, several ministries offer services to both animals and their companions. Most of these are parish-based, inspired by the instruction of St. Francis of Assisi and *Laudato Si'*. The Catholic Concern for Animals promotes through respect for animals stemming from Catholic Social Teaching, through public education and advocacy.⁸⁸ The parish of St. John Vianney in Iowa runs the St. Francis of Assisi Pet Ministry which provides support for pet owners through various types of support for pet owners especially those who grieve the loss of their companion animals.⁸⁹ The American Martyrs Catholic Church is committed to providing services like adoption, spay/neuter, and education that promote the well-being of animals.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, there are no church-based ministries in the Philippines that particularly concentrate on human-animal companionship or direct services for animals and their human companions.

The models of the cited ministries are either parish-based or managed as non-profit organizations. None of them centers on the embodied, lived, and homegrown encounter of human companions, which generates ripples of change on personal and communal levels. This thesis-project proposes the broader recognition of the ministry work of individuals who

⁸⁸ Catholic Concern for Animals, "About," last modified April 1, 2024, accessed October 5, 2025, <https://catholic-animals.com/about/>.

⁸⁹ St. John Vianney Parish, "St. Francis of Assisi Pet Ministry," accessed October 5, 2025, <https://www.sjvbett.org/pet-ministry>.

⁹⁰ American Martyrs Catholic Church, "St. Francis Animal Ministry," accessed October 5, 2025, <https://americanmartyrs.org/st-francis-animal-ministry>.

care for companion animals, particularly single women in disadvantaged socio-cultural positions, who actively choose to care for their companion animals. Consequently, this effort is a direct rebuttal against the conventional imagination of what ministry should look like on the ground. I argue that human-animal companionship is not necessarily a church-appointed designation or a formally organized ministry; yet, its service to the Kingdom of God is far-reaching and transformative, both for humans and animals. Choosing to care for companion animals and co-creating a multispecies family with them is a radical act of participating in God's ongoing creation and the repair of the severed kinship between humans and animals. Doing so is a gesture of love and kindness to the likes of Laika—the one who flew into the stars abruptly but shines brightly. She invites us to a transformed way of relating and ministering to animals, which is the heart of ecological conversion.

Animals in the Ministry of Jesus

As we ponder the ministry of human-animal companionship, we can look at Jesus as the exemplar of communion with animals. This is evident in his religious metaphors and actual encounters with them. He used the image of the Good Shepherd to signify his love for and personal knowledge of his sheep, proclaiming, “I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd, and I know mine, and mine know me” (John 10:11, 14). He used the metaphor of birds to emphasize the complete trust that humans should have in God's providence, stating, “Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (Matt 6:26). He spoke about his protective motherly love for Jerusalem using the image of a hen and her chicks, declaring, “how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as

a hen gathers her young under her wings...” (Matt 23:37). Animals also accompanied him in his spiritual quest. In his forty days in the desert, he was in close contact with wild animals (Mark 1:12-13). He was in communion with them, experiencing a mantle of protection and spiritual enrichment. These Gospel texts illustrate a form of human-animal companionship that reflects true kinship with animals, demonstrating how we should perceive and treat them as part of God’s intended communion for all creation.

Conclusion

Integral ecology, as a paradigm for relationships, perfectly signifies the *goodness* that God found in all of creation, as inscribed in Scripture. Everything was made in perfect harmony, with interdependence at the heart of creation bearing the goodness and love of the Creator. Due to patriarchal systems that pervade our reading of biblical texts, our greed for exploitation through science, and anthropocentric activities, we have deteriorated the relationship that we share with creation. Laika’s case was a human tragedy that exemplified and embodied the domination paradigm that Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests is the reason for the destruction we have brought upon creation. This way of life has plagued our relationship with animals. To aid this ailing relationship, ecological conversion bridges the separation we have created.

Ecological conversion, in its ideal yet effective form, must illuminate a critique of gender, class, race, and other structures to more fully espouse eco-justice. In this work, investigating the ministry praxis of Filipino single women and their companion animals extends the framework of ecological conversion. It reimagines ministry as multispecies, reciprocal, homegrown, and non-hierarchical. However, their care work is influenced by

forms of marginalization that must be simultaneously examined. Chapter 5 will provide a substantial analysis of their intersectional marginalization in relation to their companionship with animals.

Human-animal companionship, as a form of ministry, transcends the traditional understanding of ministry by including creation as co-creators. The ministry of attending to animals requires a decisive inclusion of this service to God's whole Kingdom in our pastoral and theological imagining. Thus, this work accomplishes two things: first, it extends the meaning of ministry through a multispecies and reciprocal relationship as a homegrown ministry praxis; second, it is attentive to how companion animals enrich us spiritually and environmentally, stirring a greater relationship with God and creation.

Chapter 2

Are Animals “It”?

“You cannot share your life in a meaningful way with any animals such as a dog, cat, rabbit, bird, rat, pig, horse and so many more and not know that we are not the only sentient and sapient beings on the planet.”¹ — Jane Goodall

Introduction

The previous chapter presented the central framework for this thesis-project: ecological conversion. Ecological conversion is a ministry that addresses the woundedness of the relationship between animals and humans. Feminist theologians suggest that the anthropocentric dominating paradigm for reading of Scripture has created biases against animals and the whole creation. Building on this, I argue that aside from biased interpretations of biblical texts regarding the relationship between animals and humans, the marginalization of animals also pervades everyday language. Our language unjustly marginalizes animals and considers them inferior beings or mere “it.” But this phenomenon is merely a manifestation of a larger issue. Language biases against animals are reinforced by philosophical and theological traditions that espouse human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism. This chapter aims to uncover the greatness of animals by acknowledging their gift of reciprocity, which supports this thesis-project’s assertion that companion animals can build meaningful relationships with humans.

¹ This quote came from an interview with Jane Goodall, conducted by Voiceless, on how she developed her drive to advocate for animals. Voiceless, “A Journey Like No Other – A Conversation with Dr. Jane Goodall DBE,” December 20, 2021, <https://voiceless.org.au/a-conversation-with-dr-jane-goodall/>.

Animal reciprocity entails cognition, agency, communication, and empathy. While I have no desire of simply valuing animals using human standards, I recognize the significance of redressing false claims about them that have been produced by hierarchical and anthropocentric theologies and philosophies. One way of honoring the traits of animals is by decentering humans as the only beings thought to be endowed with divine giftedness. Animals are co-sharers in the image of God just as humans. Acknowledging the traits of animals is vital in creating a horizontal and affirming relationship with them. In the long history of the Christian tradition, while some theologians (e.g., Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure, John Duns Scotus, Karl Rahner, Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague, Denis Edwards, Andrew Linzey, Clair Linzey, etc.) have spoken about the value of animals as co-sharers in divine goodness and God's redemptive plan, their voices have tended to be overshadowed by dominant anthropocentric theologies and philosophies.² Likewise, Carol Adams refers to Christian patriarchal theology that ranks God, humans, and animals in such a progression, *bestly theology*. In this theology, animals have been assigned the identity of *beasts*—a derogatory term that contrasts them with humans and conveys that they are of lesser value.³ This work aims to facilitate a conversation that reaches public ministry and promotes dialogue on how to rectify this unjust supposition about animals through a feminist lens.

² Elizabeth Johnson acknowledges that Christian faith tradition is not inherently “anti-ecological faith,” the voice of eco-theology, however, had not fully registered in institutions until the latter part of the twentieth century. Thus, it is of great importance that this research reinforces that animals are co-sharers in divine goodness. See Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask The Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (A&C Black, 2014), 3.

³ Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 175-176.

I approach this chapter by first discussing how language has failed to give justice to animals and their gifts. I will sketch out examples of animal metaphors that are universally used across cultures and ones that are prominent in the Filipino language. Second, I will argue that biases against animals in our language are legitimized by anthropocentric philosophical and theological traditions. I will outline the theologies/philosophies of Augustine, Aquinas, and Descartes. Third, I will identify the gifts of animals that humans often overlook or hardly recognize, summed up by the concept of animal reciprocity through the lens of feminist animal care. Lastly, I will propose naming as a counter-cultural practice against demeaning descriptions for animals in our language. Naming reverses the way we relate to animals by acknowledging their great qualities and permitting them to become part of our lives. Front and center in this chapter is the politics of care as a co-constitutive act performed by humans and animals in their kinship.

Language Has Failed Animals

Speciesism is the unjust treatment of those who do not belong to a certain species.⁴ It is the assumption that humans are superior to nonhuman creatures, a belief reproduced in language. Such can occur in the negative representation of animals in our everyday language. Robin Wall Kimmerer, an Indigenous botanist, notes, “In English, you are either a human or a thing.”⁵ This statement reveals the anthropocentric nature of language. Joan

⁴ Oscar Horta, “What Is Speciesism?,” *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 23, no. 3 (June 2010): 243–66, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-009-9205-2>. Speciesism was coined by Richard Ryder in 1970 and popularized by Peter Singer in his book *Animal Liberation*. Singer believes that most humans are speciesists. He argues that “speciesists allow the interests of their own species to override the greater interests of members of other species.” See Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), 9.

⁵ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 56, EBSCOhost.

Dunayer, philosopher and animal rights advocate, points out that the standard pronoun usage *thingifies* animals that “obscure[s] their sentience, individuality and right to autonomy.”⁶ The pronoun “it” is for animals, the same pronoun for lamps, apples, coins, blankets, and inanimate objects. Carol Adams posits that “it” “erases the living, breathing nature of the animals and reifies their object status.”⁷ This grammar convention is disconcerting as it implies that animals are lifeless objects—no consciousness, cognition, communication, or agency. People who have had companion animals for a while would say otherwise. Companion animals exhibit intelligence, emotional awareness, and the ability to learn and adapt. Their intellect may differ from human intelligence, but it has the potential to accomplish unbelievable things.

Speciesism in language uses animal metaphors to inflict insult or shame onto others. Some of these are “you act like an animal,” “you’re worse than an animal,” and “you’re a coward like a chicken.” Filipino idiomatic expressions represent animal behaviors or qualities that intend to shame or insult a person: *utak-biya* (brain of a fish), *balat kalabaw* (insensitive/thick-skinned), and *bahag ang buntot* (coward). Animal qualities are used to degrade the target individual or group by denying them human characteristics. Nick Haslam proposes that one way of dehumanizing a target individual or group is by likening them to animals and denying the target uniquely human qualities, which is called *animalistic*

⁶ Joan Dunayer, “On Speciesist Language,” *On The Issues Magazine*, February 28, 1990, <http://www.farinc.org/pdfs/Dunayer%201990.pdf>. Dunayer’s specific assignment of the term ‘*thingifies*’ makes it evocative and powerful. It illustrates how animals have been subjugated in our language system, implying their subordinate position in our consciousness and the construction of knowledge.

⁷ Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (20th Anniversary Edition) (New York: Continuum, 2010), 93.

dehumanization.⁸ Dehumanization that employs animal qualities or compares humans to animals is not only harmful to the human victim but also to the animals involved. Animals become linguistic instruments for projecting undesirable behaviors or qualities of humans. Another way animals are marginalized in language is by describing our relationship with them with hierarchical connotations. Humans who care for animals are called *pet owners*. Calling oneself “owner” implies hierarchy. Ownership, as a basis for the relationship between animals and humans, connotes that humans have a higher stature and animals are viewed as objects that are kept or collected. Animals are subjected to human supremacy and subordination.

The derogation of animals often intersects with gendered oppression. In some situations, animal metaphors contain sexism and speciesism that degrade women. Almudena Fernández-Fontecha and Rosa Jimenez-Catalan observed that in both English and Spanish, animal metaphors carry a more pronounced derogation toward women than men.⁹ Zoubida Madani and colleagues found that animal metaphors in Algerian and Jordanian proverbs associate more negative connotations with women than with men, highlighting the prominence of men over women.¹⁰ Similarly, the word *kasta* (mating) in Filipino is a sexual expression for both genders; however, women are called *pakasta*, which is a colloquial

⁸ Nick Haslam, “Dehumanization: An Integrative Review,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 10, no. 3 (July 22, 2006): 259, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_4. The characteristics that Haslam believes are uniquely human are refinement, civility, morality, and higher cognition. I presume that these descriptors or standards originate from Aquinas’ five criteria for humanity.

⁹ Almudena Fernández-Fontecha and Rosa M. Jimenez-Catalan, “Semantic Derogation in Animal Metaphor: A Contrastive-cognitive Analysis of Two Male/Female Examples in English and Spanish,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 35, no. 5 (March 25, 2003): 771–94, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166\(02\)00127-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0378-2166(02)00127-3).

¹⁰ Zoubida Madani, Nimer Abusalim, and Mohammad Rayyan, “Gender representation in animal-related proverbs: Algerian vs. Jordanian Arabic,” *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (June 8, 2023): 1-14, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1145200>.

adjective synonymous with being sexually promiscuous. When *kasta* is associated with men, it is a compliment to their virility. Men in their inner circles would remark, “*marami na ‘yang kinasta*” (he has slept around) to mean that the man is well-experienced in sex. There are animal metaphors that illustrate the roles of women, but have no counterparts for the roles of men. *Inahin [na baboy]* (hen pig) is used to stress motherhood or pregnancy, specifically women who have several children and can hardly prioritize themselves. Another one is the word *ahas* (snake) or *inahas* (the act) to describe a woman having an affair with a committed man. I cannot think of equivalent animal metaphors that depict men in a similar fashion. Animal metaphors tend to have more weight when they are directed at women, reflecting forms of “benign sexism”¹¹ that sound complimentary but reinforce women’s subordinate status. For instance, men in the Philippines describe physically attractive women as *chicks* (a young bird) or *chickababes* to connote desirability, but it simultaneously objectifies and sexualizes the receiver. These animal metaphors not only function as harmful descriptors for the identities and qualities of women, but they also aggravate the socially constructed roles and subordination of women.¹² They reflect how society expects women to perform domestic work, bear a child, and provide sexual satisfaction to men.

¹¹ Nick Haslam, Steve Loughnan, and Pamela Sun, “Beastly: What Makes Animal Metaphors Offensive?” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 30, no. 3 (September 2011): 313-14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X11407168>.

¹² Studies on the construction of the marginal position of women in societies, as depicted by animal metaphors in literature, are growing. See Nasambu M. Barasa and Isaac N. Opande, “The Use of Animal Metaphors in the Representation of Women in Bukusu and Gusii Proverbs of Kenya,” *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10, no. 2 (2017): 91-104, https://www.academia.edu/108188108/The_Use_of_Animal_Metaphors_in_the_Representation_of_Women_in_Bukusu_and_Gusii_Proverbs_in_Kenya. For animal metaphors in fables from the Philippines and South Africa: See Genevieve Jorolan Quintero and Connie Makgabo, “Animals as Representations of Female Domestic Roles in Selected Fables From the Philippines and South Africa,” *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South* 4, no. 1 (April 28, 2020): 42-47, <https://doi.org/10.36615/sotls.v4i1.121>.

Language constructs power asymmetries.¹³ The animal metaphors delineated earlier have layers of marginalization toward women and animals. Both women and animals are oppressed by patriarchy in language, among others. Words that mortify animals or caricature them as inferior to humans conveniently marginalize them. Vilifying language toward animals depicts them as monstrous and beastly. Biased and inaccurate media portrayals of animals have instilled fear and distrust in our minds. For instance, the American film *Jaws* has affected the public perception of sharks as marine “villains.” Across cultures, animal metaphors convey hostile meanings that pertain to human deficits. Such words, references, idioms, and metaphors exacerbate the otherness of animals. Although we do not contemplate animal metaphors when we utter them, they deliver a message that animals and their qualities are not desirable, and conveniently use them to describe the worst in humans. We turn to animals as a vocabulary for incompetence, aggressiveness, promiscuity, abuse, and the list goes on. Sexist remarks with animal metaphors towards women amplify the entanglements between humans and animals, with women and animals instrumentalized by men to assert illusory power over both classifications. However, when we use this type of language, we overlook that animals become victims in the process. Joan Dunayer writes that animals are oppressed by speciesism in language, as women are by sexist language:

Speciesist language has far from trivial consequences. Although nonhuman animals cannot discern the contempt in the words that disparage them, this contempt legitimates their oppression. Like sexist language, speciesist language fosters exploitation and abuse. As feminist philosopher Stephanie Ross (1981) has stated with regard to women, “oppression does not require the awareness or co-operation of its victims.”¹⁴

¹³ Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (New York: Longman Inc., 1989), 3-4.

¹⁴ Joan Dunayer, “Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots,” in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 17, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1198x6d.5>.

Dunayer adds that the pejorative images we attach to animals do not accurately represent who they are.¹⁵ She reasons that they are a projection of our bad traits onto innocent subjects, which widens the divide between animals and humans, further encouraging humans to do it conveniently.

Every negative image of another species helps keep that species oppressed. Most such images are gross distortions. Nonhuman animals rarely possess the character traits that pejoratives assign to them. In reality the imputed traits are negative human traits between humans and animals that explicitly shape how we view and relate to animals... Why the lies, then? Why the contempt? With contemptuous words, humans establish and maintain emotional distance from other animals. This distance permits abuse without commensurate guilt. Humans blame their nonhuman victims.¹⁶

When we resort to animal metaphors to deliberately inflict pain or dehumanize others, we assume that we only harm human relationships. In reality, we also injure animals and our shared relationships with them. It reinforces their oppression and denies their dignity and rights—leading to the aggravation of the distance between animals and us. This phenomenon is a serious threat to the harmony of all relationships within the ecological family. We should inquire why we exploit animals for the fractures in our humanity instead of confronting those fractures directly. Doing so exposes two limits: the limits of human language and human intellect. We have long claimed that these faculties set us apart from animals, yet they cannot function without drawing meanings from animals. Tragically, the meanings we choose are the cruel ones—those that turn animals into instruments of human insult and injury.

¹⁵ Dunayer, “Sexist Words,” 17-18. Dunayer provides examples of how specific animals are not what humans have imagined them to be. Pigs are not as dirty as they are culturally portrayed. They keep their living space neat. Rats do not betray their kind, which is the opposite of the “ratting” description associated with people who are not trustworthy. Rats attend to the vulnerable members of their community. The defensive traits of chickens are to protect their young, which negates the cultural association of fierceness with young women.

¹⁶ Dunayer, “Sexist Words,” 17-18.

Anthropocentric Philosophical and Theological Traditions

Anthropocentric philosophical and theological traditions, as a modality of discourse, have influenced our language. These traditions do not fully recognize animal faculties but rather consider animals as subpar beings. As a caveat, I want to emphasize that these anthropocentric philosophies and theologies arose prior to the advent of modern science, which is why they run contrary to the recent findings regarding animal faculties. However, it is necessary to note that despite this, these traditions have shaped the different disciplines that inform our animal rhetoric. Thus, we still carry them in our consciousness, which flows into our linguistic orientation and moral agency. It is not my intention to discuss these philosophies and theologies in detail, but rather to broadly outline their core assumptions. Further, it is an invitation to reflect on how they have influenced our perception of animals today, with anthropocentric undertones evident in our language. This section will cover Thomistic, Augustinian, and Cartesian philosophies/theologies on animals.

Augustinian Theology

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a theologian and philosopher, is a key figure in shaping Christian cosmology, including the human-animal relationship. His perception of animals often oscillates between abstraction and utility—seeing them as manifestations of divine wisdom or as instruments for human use. Scholars observe that Augustine affirmed the hierarchical ordering of creatures, in which humans have authority over the rest of creation. Although the Great Chain of Being¹⁷ framework was a later development, the work of Aquinas and others laid the groundwork for its conception.

¹⁷ The Great Chain of Being is a classification system that ranks all beings, including God, angels, principalities, animals, plants, and humans. This hierarchical classification dominated Western thought and

De Genesi ad Litteram and *City of God* are integral works of Augustine that convey the hierarchy between humans and animals. Moreover, both works articulate a theological anthropology that endorses human centrality in creation. In *City of God*, Augustine asserts that God “fashioned [hu]man in his own image...through reason and intelligence to surpass all other animals...since they had no mind of this sort.”¹⁸ This underscores intellect as the dividing line between species and the determinant for recognizing humans as a reflection of God’s image and likeness. Written earlier than *City of God*, *De Genesi ad Litteram* reflects Augustine’s rumination on the Creation accounts textured by philosophical reasoning. He contrasts the command of God to the birds with the command to humans. He presumes that the sensation of animals is not a manifestation of reason or intelligence, concluding that they are not on par with humans. He writes:

Still he does not continue in the same person until the end of the blessing; for there follows, "And let the flying things multiply over the earth." He did not say, "Multiply over the earth." Perhaps this signifies that the sensation of living souls is not so close to reason that they can perfectly understand one urging them, as can those who have intelligence and can use reason.¹⁹

Augustine consistently reiterates that the image and likeness of God is only present in humans because of their faculty of reason or intellect. He developed the teaching of *Imago Dei*, claiming that God resides in the rational soul solely in humans. The following passages

became the primary basis for the distinction between humans and nonhuman animals in philosophical and biological traditions.

¹⁸ Augustine, *City of God, Volume III: Books 8–11*, trans. David S. Wiesen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), XII. 24.

¹⁹ Augustine, *On Genesis: Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees and On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, trans. Roland J. Teske, vol. 84 of *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 15.50.

denote that *Imago Dei* subscribes to the distinction between humans and animals determined by human intellect.

And God said, ‘Let us make man to our image and likeness.’ Here we should notice how the animals are grouped together and yet kept separate. Scripture says that man was made on the same day as the beasts; for they are all alike earthly animals. Yet on account of the excellence of reason, according to which man is made to the image and likeness of God, it speaks of him separately, after it had finished speaking of the other earthly animals in the customary manner, by saying, And God saw that it was good.²⁰

But all such things were made through the supereminent and immutable and undefilable likeness of him who created all things. Thus they are beautiful with parts like one another; yet not all things, but only the rational substance, was made "to the likeness." Hence, all things were made through it, but only the soul was made to it.²¹

Peter Huff observes that Augustine recognizes that animals have souls endowed with “memory, sense, and appetite,” as well as the capacity to feel pain.²² This notation facilitates a nuanced view of the complexity of animals, not simply designed as inanimate matter. Indeed, for Augustine, they are not mere flesh and bones; they are sentient participants in the divine order of creation. Likewise, Christina Hoenig’s reading of Augustine interprets animal nature as instrumental for human utility by mediating spirituality, morality, and materiality.²³ Augustine views the value of animals from a functional standpoint: animals reflect divine wisdom and serve human vocation by mediating between humans and God, reminding humans to overcome “beastly” impulses, and attending to human material needs. Thus, while

²⁰ Augustine, *On Genesis*, 16.55.

²¹ Augustine, *On Genesis*, 16.59.

²² Peter Huff, “From Dragons to Worms: Animals and the Subversion of Hierarchy in Augustine’s Theology,” *Melita Theologica* 43, no. 2 (1992): 32.

²³ Christina Hoenig, “Augustine of Hippo on Nonhuman Animals,” *Journal of Animal Ethics* 13, no. 2 (October 1, 2023): 126-127, <https://doi.org/10.5406/21601267.13.2.03>.

Augustine acknowledges animals as an impetus for spiritual awakening and moral perfecting, he does not attribute to them any faculty beyond sensation or reason comparable to human intellect.

In *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Augustine praises God's divine wisdom for the greatness of creation, which inherently includes animals. Beneath his appreciation is the anthropocentric tendency, with humans being the "crown" of creation and the basis of the hierarchy of creatures. In *City of God*, he establishes this cosmic hierarchy that governs the existence of all creatures and the divine order of everything. Although Augustine does not deny the sensation and function of animals, he denies them the capacity for reason—the faculty that solely reflects God's image and likeness. While *Imago Dei* validates the dignity of humans, it implicitly reinforces the subjugation of animals in more ways than one in Christian and Western cosmologies.

Thomistic Scholarship

Aristotle's (384–322 BC) view on hierarchical ordering of souls had shaped the Christian Western thought, including the distinctions between animals and humans by the scholastic thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aristotle predominantly endorsed the hierarchical ordering of creatures, with humans occupying a higher rank than animals. He believes that every creature has a soul or form and characteristics that allow the body to function. The soul of plants makes them achieve nutritive function; the soul of animals

enables them to perceive, move, and sense.²⁴ On the other hand, he justifies that only the soul of humans can think or reason.²⁵

Thomas Aquinas' works *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles* reveal his stance on human-animal relations. Aquinas believes that the primary distinction between humans and animals is humans' possession of an intellectual soul, "for an animal is such by its sensitive soul, while a man is a man by the intellectual soul,"²⁶ highlighting that rationality is not a feature of animals. This distinction he makes has implications for the relational and ontological belonging of creatures. Among all mortals, humans hold the highest position of governance over everything on earth, which gives humans the authority to utilize everything else below them. He expounds on Genesis 1:26 as the basis for human hierarchy. The hierarchy of cosmologies implied by Aquinas in his writing pertains to the designation of "mastership" or power to govern the *inferior*²⁷ one. Moreover, he also categorizes creatures as "perfect" and "imperfect". Those that are imperfect are for the use of the perfect. It is assumed that the consumption or utilization of the perfect or the imperfect is dictated by the same hierarchy designated by Aristotle (i.e., plants, animals, then humans). He articulates that humans, being endowed with God's image, should be masters over animals. Such a hierarchical stance rationalizes the subordination of animals, referring to them as *property*. Further, he says that this mastership is natural. Aquinas defends:

²⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. J. A. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), 414a30–414b15.

²⁵ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 414b15–414b20.

²⁶ Thomas Aquinas, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., 1913) I.76.3.

²⁷ Aquinas uses the term "inferior" to highlight the hierarchical relationships of creatures with one another. He argues that this system of order is divinely ordained. The one inferior is subject to the ruling of the one at a higher rank.

First, from the order observed by nature; for just as in the generation of things we perceive a certain order of procession of the perfect from the imperfect (thus matter is for the sake of form; and the imperfect form, for the sake of the perfect), so also is there order in the use of natural things; thus the imperfect are for the use of the perfect; as the plants make use of the earth for their nourishment, and animals make use of plants, and man makes use of both plants and animals. Therefore it is in keeping with the order of nature, that man should be master over animals... Wherefore, as man, being made to the image of God, is above other animals, these are rightly subject to his government. Thirdly, this is proved from a property of man and of other animals... Therefore the subjection of other animals to man is proved to be natural.²⁸

In another section, Aquinas suggests that animals act out of instinct that is indicative of limited reason, which enables them to respond in obedience to humans. This is an important detail about his perspectives on animals, as it delineates human intellect from the instinctive responses of animals when they interact with fellow animals and humans alike.

All animals by their natural instinct have a certain participation of prudence and reason: which accounts for the fact that cranes follow their leader, and bees obey their queen. So all animals would have obeyed man of their own accord, as in the present state some domestic animals obey him.²⁹

The passage insinuates that animal instincts underpin the relationship between animals and humans, characterized by a command-obedience dynamic. For Aquinas, animals are capable of obeying their master, but not to the extent of exhibiting moral agency that equates with human rationality.

In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas clarifies the absence of rationality in animals. He cites five reasons that validate their incapability of rationality. Rational speech, civility, an

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), I, q. 96, a. 1, ad 4, https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae%5B1%5D,_EN.pdf

²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 96, a. 1, ad 4.

evolutionary or progressive nature, or morality are signs of the presence of rationality, which is not in animals.

The irrationality of dumb animals is apparent from this, first, that they are dumb (alogoi), or devoid of rational speech; secondly, that they are uncivilised, and uncivilisable, except in so far as they partake of the civilisation of man; thirdly that, apart from man, they are racially unprogressive; fourthly, that they are devoid of all idea of morality and religion; fifthly, that there is no inter-breeding between them and even the lowest types of the one incontestably rational animal, man. The indefeasible coexistence of human shape and animal rationality is as well established as any coexistence in physical science.³⁰

Rationality, therefore, enables humans to communicate motivated by will and intellect, not simply by vocalization or repeated random sounds. A rational being is capable of moral discernment, one who can abide by a prescribed behavior or norm agreed upon by a society. Rationality is evident in continued progress and development. Since animals are considered non-rational creatures, they are subject to human subsistence, intellectual progress, and spiritual perfecting. He stresses that animals are subject to human dominion. Aquinas believes that humans have the authority to utilize animals for food, clothing, and other material needs. The Catechism of the Catholic Church maintains this position on the use of animals for material needs.³¹ Aquinas writes in *Summa Contra Gentiles*:

In fact, man uses all kinds of things for his own advantage: some for food, others for clothing... because he can obtain food for himself from a variety of things. Other things he uses for transportation, since we find man the inferior of many animals in quickness of movement, and in the strength to do work; other animals being provided, as it were, for his assistance. And, in addition to this, man uses all sense objects for the perfection of intellectual knowledge. Hence it is said of man in the

³⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, in *Of God and His Creatures: An Annotated Translation of The Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Joseph Rickaby S.J. (The Catholic Primer), II.82.452, <https://basilica.ca/documents/2016/10/St.%20Thomas%20Aquinas-The%20Summa%20Contra%20Gentiles.pdf>.

³¹ John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), sec. 2418, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM.

Psalms (8:8) in a statement directed to God: “You have subjected all things under his feet.”³²

This passage opines that animals are inferior and lack rationality. They are God’s providential care for human attainment of fulfillment and perfection. Consistent with Augustine, Aquinas believes animals are not ends in themselves but means toward human spirituality and material fulfillment. The relationship they share with humans is instrumentality, not relationality, rooted in the hierarchical ordering of creatures. It implies that even if animals have a relationship with humans, it is not a profound communion that enriches both ends. On the question of whether we should extend charity to animals, Aquinas responds that “the love of charity extends to none but God and our neighbor. But the word neighbor cannot be extended to irrational creatures, since they have no fellowship with man in the rational life. Therefore, charity does not extend to irrational creatures.”³³ This statement not only withholds charity for animals but also eliminates any form of fellowship or communion between animals and humans. Animals are not part of Aquinas’ imagined moral vocation of humans. Although animals serve as an integral mediator between humans and God and a manifestation of God’s divine wisdom, they remain creatures without moral standing in our ethical consideration.³⁴

³² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Book Three – Providence, Part II*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke, online edition at Isidore, III.22.8, <https://isidore.co/aquinas/ContraGentiles3a.htm#22>.

³³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II. q 25. a 3.

³⁴ It is intriguing for many people when we associate moral standing with animals. Such an assertion may raise questions about whose life is more important, between a human being and an animal, in a scenario where only one can be saved. If we were to follow the traditional Western dualist ethical principle, it is human life that merits deliverance over animal life. Lois K. Daly takes on an ecofeminist stance and turns to the ethics of “reverence for life,” articulated by Albert Schweitzer. The principle contends that there must be no dichotomy between the life of humans and that of other species: “The ethics of reverence for life makes no distinction between higher and lower, more precious and less precious lives.” Schweitzer presumes that all living beings have the “will-to-live,” or the drive to exist, which we must respect. However, Schweitzer acknowledges that in real life, one being may need to perish while another survives. To address this dilemma, we are left to our subjective discernment, guided by our conscience, and by “bear[ing] the responsibility for the

Aquinas's anthropocentric assertions about animals have drawn criticisms from contemporary scholars, theologians, and activists. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer denounces his speciesism. Singer comments on the belief of Aquinas, stating that, “no argument could reveal the essence of speciesism more clearly,” singling out his shortcoming for not seeing anything wrong with killing animals only when it poses harm to humans.³⁵ In her commentary, Judith Barad criticizes the incoherence of Aquinas’ framework. Barad argues that if Aquinas classifies animals as more than inanimate or vegetative in nature, then animals must not be treated as mere objects subject to human killing due to their ontological status.³⁶ From the perspective of theology, Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey view the teaching of Aquinas on animals as anthropocentric that culminates in the killing of animals for human use.³⁷ The reliance of Aquinas on Aristotelian thought constrains the status of animals to be more than just inert creatures. Consequently, his scholarship continues to shape debates on animal welfare—whether animals should live free from pain and exploitation at the hands of humans.

life which is sacrificed.” Lois K. Daly, “Feminism, Reverence for Life, and Feminist Theological Ethics,” in *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches in Ecological Theology*, ed. Charles Birch, William Eaken, and Jay B. McDaniel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 86–110. The ethics of “reverence for life” cited here can be found in Albert Schweitzer, *The Teaching of Reverence for Life*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965); Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought: An Autobiography*, trans. C. T. Campion (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1949).

³⁵ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 195-196.

³⁶ Judith Barad, “Aquinas’ Inconsistency on the Nature and the Treatment of Animals,” *Between the Species*: Vol. 4, No. 2 Article 7 (1988): 6-9, <https://doi.org/10.15368/bts.1988v4n2.5>.

³⁷ Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey, “Introduction: Before Animal Theology,” in *Animal Theologians*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Clair Linzey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023; online ed., Oxford Academic, April 20, 2023), 5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197655542.003.0001>.

Cartesian Philosophy

René Descartes (1596-1650) was a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist from the Enlightenment, often regarded as the father of modern philosophy. His view of animals has profoundly shaped the anthropocentric perception of animals. Descartes reduced animals to *automata* or machines that do not have consciousness, reason, or feeling.³⁸ He expounds on the theory of animal automatism in *Discourse on the Method*, *Principles of Philosophy*, and *The Passions of the Soul*. In *Discourse on the Method*, Descartes argues that two tests distinguish humans from animals as *automata*: speech and reason. He claims that animals cannot communicate meaningfully through words or symbols. Animals in his thought may express pain, but cannot respond intelligibly as humans can. As for intellect, animals do not act with intention and knowledge but only with instincts or the mechanical programming of their organs.

They could never use words or other signs arranged in such a manner as to declare our thoughts to others...Although such machines might execute many things with equal or greater perfection than any of us, they would fail in others, showing that they did not act from knowledge but solely from the disposition of their organs: for while reason is a universal instrument available on every occasion, these organs need a particular arrangement for each action.³⁹

Some authors defend Descartes' claims. John Cottingham nuances the standpoint of Descartes by pointing out that Descartes believes animals do not possess intellect, but does not deny their ability to experience sensation.⁴⁰ Peter Harrison further clarifies Descartes'

³⁸ Norman Kemp Smith, *New Studies in the Philosophy of Descartes*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1963), 136, 140.

³⁹ René Descartes, *A Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (Waiheke Island: The Floating Press, 2009), 72-73, <https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=60396c38-336d-3e49-8a3a-d8bb88d12a98>.

⁴⁰ John Cottingham, "'A Brute to the Brutes?': Descartes' Treatment of Animals," *Philosophy* 53, no. 206 (October 1, 1978): 551-59, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0031819100026371>.

attribution of sensation to animals as simply reflexive reactions, rather than conscious feelings.⁴¹ Either interpretation offers a normative and dualist classification of animals that favors human intelligence and self-consciousness. Current research challenges claims that deny self-awareness among animals. Research shows that animals exhibit self-awareness through mirror self-recognition.⁴² Although not conclusive, these findings are concrete evidence of awareness. David DeGrazia posits that self-awareness of animals as intentional response is on display when they engage in activities that require more complex responses, such as problem-solving and utilizing tools.⁴³

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German philosopher, rejects the Cartesian view of animals as *automata* by recognizing their sentience. While Kant acknowledges their ability to feel, he denies that they have rationality and claims that they are simply a means to human ends. He notes, “Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely means to an end. That end is man.”⁴⁴ Like Augustine and Aquinas, he supposes that humans are the ultimate goal of animals. Although Kant does not directly reject the worth of animals, it implies that their worth is contingent upon how they can support human flourishing. It is inherently problematic to believe that their worth lies in their utilitarian existence. It justifies the killing or maltreatment of animals if they no longer serve this purpose. A more contemporary

⁴¹ Peter Harrison, “Descartes on Animals,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 167 (April 1992): 222–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2220217>.

⁴² Yanyu Lei, “Sociality and Self-awareness in Animals,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (January 9, 2023): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1065638>.

⁴³ David DeGrazia, “Self-awareness in animals,” in *The Philosophy of Animal Minds*, ed. Robert W. Lurz (New York, 2009), 205-206, https://philosophy.columbia.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5446/files/2023-01/degrazia_selfawarenessanimals.pdf.

⁴⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1930), 239.

philosopher, Donald Davidson, rejected the idea that animals have rational thinking, as language is a prerequisite for rationality, which animals do not possess.⁴⁵

These Western anthropocentric theological and philosophical traditions form the foundation of many belief systems deeply ingrained in our language. These traditions insist on the superiority of humans and deny that animals share similar characteristics and functions with humans. Human traits are treated with confidence as solely possessed by humans and not by other creatures. *Anthropodenial* is the blindness to the shared qualities between animals and humans, which Frans de Waal coined.⁴⁶ The perspectives of Augustine, Aquinas, and Descartes honor human intellect, morality, and the capacity to invoke spiritual sensibilities. However, modern research challenges Western hierarchical thought on the status of animals. We discovered that chimpanzees and bonobos share 98.8% of DNA, making them the closest relatives of humans. Our shared DNA with specific species is immutable and must be respected in our language, ethical considerations, and moral relationships with animals.

However, Lori Gruen argues that simply depending on human-like qualities of animals in order for us to respect them is anthropocentric (arrogant anthropocentrism).⁴⁷ Making humans the standard by which we must treat animals is problematic. Instead, we must honor our differences as much as we acknowledge our similarities. In the same vein,

⁴⁵ Donald Davidson, "Rational Animals," *Dialectica* 36, no. 4 (1982) 317–27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42969807>.

⁴⁶ Frans B. M. de Waal, "Anthropomorphism and anthropodenial: Consistency in our thinking about humans and other animals," *Philosophical Topics* 27, no. 1 (1999): 255-280.

⁴⁷ Arrogant anthropocentrism is the belief that glorifies humans as the center and basis of worth because of their superior traits. Lori Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals* (Lantern Books, 2015), 24.

Sallie McFague calls the “refusal to appreciate [animals] in their *difference*” speciesism.⁴⁸ To deny animals of their uniqueness is to deny them of their fullness. This is not to highlight their difference from us as an egoistic practice of superiority, but rather to emphasize embracing their uniqueness, which can lead to the realization that difference dictates a different set of needs, not a lesser value. McFague notes that “we are in a continuum with them as they are with us; it is us not versus them, but us *and* them, for the roots of human nature lie deep within others we call animals.”⁴⁹ Our existence has evolved, intertwined with theirs, as we shared history and dependence. Animals are beings that can form a bond with humans through a unique system of communication; they can express pain and contentment; they can exercise their agency. Only if we allow animals to touch our lives can we truly realize that they are not the beings we describe with foul language.

Animal Relational Reciprocity

This section argues that animal reciprocity⁵⁰ is an inherent capacity in animals that demonstrates cognition, agency, communication, and empathy. Threads of hierarchical and dualistic Western thought outlined earlier have long denied animals all these abilities. To counter this and reclaim the capabilities of animals, I will draw from studies regarding

⁴⁸ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Fortress Press, 1993), 121.

⁴⁹ McFague, *The Body of God*, 119.

⁵⁰ Animal reciprocity or reciprocal altruism refers to the behavior of animals of extending help to their fellow species or another with the expectation that it will be returned in the future. The concept was introduced by evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers in his 1971 paper, “The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism.” See Robert L. Trivers, “The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism,” *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 46, no. 1 (1971): 35-57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2822435>. Not all animals are pre-conditioned to perform reciprocal altruism due to the complex cognitive abilities it requires. Species observed exhibiting it include primates, vampire bats, vervet monkeys, and various bird species. While pets or companion animals may not necessarily display an evolutionary form of reciprocal altruism in a strict sense due to their domestication, it is undeniable that they are capable of being altruistic through their emotional attunement and mutual care.

animal reciprocity through the lens of feminist animal care, which prioritizes embodied knowledge and affective reciprocity with animals over a hierarchical and abstract manner of encountering them. This approach requires a deep and relational understanding of animals—one that extends beyond a behaviorist analysis of their existence. Thus, I will incorporate my personal observations⁵¹ of Pancake, my dog, and other animals to establish that animals are indeed capable of being in communion with humans. Their capacity to be in fellowship with us is not simply a product of instincts but of their multiple gifts.

Animal Reciprocity

While my dog Pancake was walking home with me, I noticed a white bird with a seemingly injured wing. It attempted to flap its wings but struggled to lift itself off due to the left wing being stuck. Moments later, a black bird approached the wounded bird. I was scared that it might prey on the wounded one. It appeared that the injured bird was being pursued. However, the wounded one was being guided to find the momentum to fly. Soon, another bird landed, then two more. They began to circle the wounded bird, providing it with assistance. This moment showcased how animals can cooperate and work together to survive and navigate their environment. It was a beautiful sight to behold that both Pancake and I witnessed.

Reciprocal altruism refers to evolutionary behavioral responses between non-kin beings that involve beneficial acts toward one another, with the expectation of future

⁵¹ In line with the theoretical shift in feminist animal care toward embodied and relational care for animals, close observations of animals are an important source of knowledge about human-animal relations. Thus, honoring autoethnography as a method for building knowledge about animals must be positively constructed in research. This, however, must be in conversation with scientific findings to validate, analyze, or challenge our observations.

reciprocation.⁵² This behavior is a fundamental aspect of animal cooperation. Reciprocity is argued to be uncommon among animals as it requires sophisticated cognitive abilities, and yet it can occur in long-term social bonds.⁵³ Furthermore, research indicates that while reciprocity demands advanced cognitive skills, it is not a single strategy; other strategies can also be explored.⁵⁴

It is improbable for animals to engage in reciprocal relationships without some form of agency, communication, and cognition. Thus, animal reciprocity demonstrates their unique ability to interact with purpose and intention. Critics may contend that such behavior is merely a conditioned behavior or a product of evolutionary instinct. Frans de Waal has argued that primates and other species can exhibit empathy and that their actions are more than mechanical responses.⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Mark Rowlands posits that some animals may act out of moral consideration.⁵⁶ These behaviors imply intentionality, which cannot be reduced to instinct alone. In this context, intentionality is defined as a planned response to the situation that may or may not require complex problem solving. Simply put, it is when animals attain a goal. Intentionality is evident when animals solve problems, express their desires, and respond to changes in their environment. This form of intentionality is

⁵² Trivers, “The Evolution,” 35.

⁵³ Esteban Freidin, Fabricio Carballo, and Mariana Bentosela, “Direct Reciprocity in Animals: The Roles of Bonding and Affective Processes,” *International Journal of Psychology* 52, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): 163–70, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijop.12215>.

⁵⁴ Manon K. Schweinfurth and Josep Call, “Reciprocity: Different behavioural strategies, cognitive mechanisms and psychological processes,” *Learning & Behavior* 47, no. 4 (2019): 284–301, <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13420-019-00394-5>.

⁵⁵ Frans BM. De Waal, “Putting the altruism back into altruism: the evolution of empathy,” *Annu. Rev. Psychol.* 59, no. 1 (2008): 279–300, <https://science.umd.edu/faculty/wilkinson/BIOL608W/deWaalAnnRevPsych2008.pdf>.

⁵⁶ Mark Rowlands, *Can Animals Be Moral?* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 7–14.

observable in Pancake. I am amazed at Pancake when she plans to retrieve her ball underneath the sofa or when she prefers sardines to meat. When she knows that our walk is about to end, she pulls me the other way so we can continue walking, or sits on the ground to prevent going home. I have seen videos of dogs and cats protecting babies or saving them from a sudden fall. These acts suggest that they are not just sensation-driven responses. They require a multi-step process of thinking. Animals can perform more than rudimentary tasks with self-awareness or intentional action. Donald Griffin, a zoologist, argues that animals are conscious and, as such, they experience mental images and are self-aware.⁵⁷ When I cry, she approaches me and leans in. Although she does not fully understand my feelings, she seems aware that something is amiss. I find weight in my anecdotal observations of Pancake, but I wish to stress with caution that animal intentionality or even moral consideration (with emphasis on relationality with other species including humans) can be usurped by domestication. On the other hand, Donna Haraway observes that dog training can be a “positive bondage” in which dogs and humans develop a form of communication, and the former are trained to behave in communion with humans in different settings.⁵⁸ Moreover, while training has gained various opinions, for Haraway, it is a complex and situated intervention that can enrich cohabitation between dogs and humans in the more-than-human world.

⁵⁷ Donald Redfield Griffin, *The Question of Animal Awareness: Evolutionary Continuity of Mental Experience*, 1981, 21–32.

⁵⁸ Donna J. Haraway, “The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness,” in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Scholarship Online, 2017), 137-145, <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816650477.003.0002>.

Feminist Animal Care

Theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas consider intellect and morality as the defining traits that distinguish humans from animals. Thus, considering animals as moral subjects disturbs the long-held position on hierarchy and primacy of humans over animals and other species. Empathy, as part of the faculty of care, is often associated with humans; however, scientific evidence suggests that animals can also exhibit it. Feminist animal care theory⁵⁹ directly responds to theological and rationalist traditions that do not fully recognize the totality of animals, particularly their capacity for emotional fellowship. Josephine Donovan argues that the agenda of utilitarian animal rights scholars (e.g., Peter Singer) fighting for animal rights has its own merit, and yet she urges that “it is also possible indeed, necessary to ground that ethic in an emotional and spiritual conversation with nonhuman life-form”⁶⁰ to underscore that relationality on the basis of affective domains can also be a valuable point for departure. Donovan calls for forging a relationship with animals that is founded in empathy and care as a basis for protecting their rights, not one based only on abstraction and calculation. Sentimentalism and emotionalism are attachments that are not fully acknowledged in the male-dominant animal rights strand. However, feminist theorists of animal ethics argue that forming emotional bonds with animals through care and fellowship can be more impactful and beneficial for them. Mary Midgley remarks that animals show “social and emotional complexity of the kind which is expressed by the

⁵⁹ Feminist animal care contrasts with utilitarian animal rights theory by advocating for animal ethics grounded in emotional fellowship, relational care, and the intricate interconnections between humans and animals. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan are the prominent proponents of this theory. See Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (Burns & Oates, 1996).

⁶⁰ Josephine Donovan, “Animal Rights and Feminist Theory,” *Signs* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 375, <https://doi.org/10.1086/494588>.

formation of deep, subtle and lasting relationships.”⁶¹ Feminist animal care shifts the focus from rights to relationships, which is more lasting and capable of fostering genuine care from humans. Donovan also reimagines animals as interlocutors within feminist standpoint theory, implying that, like women, they embody situated knowledge of oppression and marginalization. To defend their incapacity to articulate their oppression due to the absence of language as posited by earlier philosophical trends, Donovan opines that humans should learn to understand animal language.⁶² Carol Adams pushes the boundaries of reimagining animals within our linguistic and moral particularities, suggesting: “What if trying to have a conversation with an animal is like trying to have a conversation with God? Would we then bring a discipline of attending to our relationships with animals?”⁶³ These questions are cogent, asking whether animals are any less worthy of receiving moral consideration than God or our fellow humans. Further, within this theological paradigm, animals must necessarily be conceived in association with God as a means of grounding such respect.

Relational reciprocity between companion animals and humans is well-established. Research shows that puppies develop attachment patterns toward their humans and respond

⁶¹ Donovan, “Animal Rights,” 351.

⁶² Josephine Donovan suggests understanding animals through “analogy based on homology” by reading the body responses of animals and imagining how they would feel being in the same situation. For instance, she explains, “If that dog is yelping, whining, leaping about, licking an open cut, and since if I had an open wound I know I would similarly be (or feeling like) crying and moving about anxiously because of the pain, I therefore conclude that the animal is experiencing the same kind of pain as I would and is expressing distress about it. One imagines, in short, how the animal is feeling based on how one would feel in a similar situation.” See Josephine Donovan, “Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue,” *Signs* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 321-322, <https://doi.org/10.1086/491750>.

⁶³ Carol Adams redresses “beastly theologies” through “second-person theologies,” which shift the position of animals in theological discourse from objects to subjects, from metaphors (of what human beings are not) to embodied beings, and from the *absent referent*—the linguistic and material displacement of animals that obscures their suffering (e.g., the transformation of cows into beef and pigs into pork)—to a recognition of their real, fleshly existence. See Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 192.

differently to strangers.⁶⁴ Gazing is a powerful form of communication that conveys messages even without verbal cues. Dogs are also capable of this interaction. As dogs engage in mutual gaze with humans, it increases oxytocin levels in both, forming a strong interspecies bond.⁶⁵ This gaze is particularly observable when dogs maintain eye contact with their companions. Gregory Berns, a neuroscientist, explains the distinctiveness of dogs' social intelligence that presumes their empathy, "the defining trait of dogs, therefore, is their interspecies social intelligence, an ability to intuit what humans and other animals are thinking. Wolves do this to hunt prey. But dogs evolved their social intelligence into living with other species instead of eating them. Dogs' great social intelligence means that they probably also have a high capacity for empathy."⁶⁶ As suggested, the intelligence of dogs surpasses Western thought about animals with their ability to express empathy towards others. Moreover, it repudiates that they cannot be in fellowship and build a reciprocal relationship with humans.

Although more literature illustrates attachment patterns among dogs, some research supports that socio-cognitive abilities are also observable in cats as they interact with their caregivers.⁶⁷ Moreover, research shows that cats have a functional understanding of human

⁶⁴ József Topál et al., "Attachment to Humans: A Comparative Study on Hand-reared Wolves and Differently Socialized Dog Puppies," *Animal Behaviour* 70, no. 6 (November 8, 2005): 1367–75, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anbehav.2005.03.025>.

⁶⁵ Miho Nagasawa et al., "Oxytocin-gaze Positive Loop and the Coevolution of Human-dog Bonds," *Science* 348, no. 6232 (April 16, 2015): 333–36, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1261022>.

⁶⁶ Gregory Berns, *How Dogs Love Us: A Neuroscientist and His Adopted Dog Decode the Canine Brain* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 229.

⁶⁷ Kristyn R. Vitale, Alexandra C. Behnke, and Monique A.R. Udell, "Attachment Bonds Between Domestic Cats and Humans," *Current Biology* 29, no. 18 (September 1, 2019) R864–65, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.08.036>.

emotions⁶⁸ which assists them in forming bonds with humans. Interestingly, Jacques Derrida offers a deeply personal reflection that sheds light on this dynamic. Recounting an experience of being naked before his cat, he questions the strict and normative divide between humans and animals. He states that the animal gaze motivates the human to introspect and acknowledge the subjectivity of animals. Derrida's compelling experience of being gazed at by his cat disrupts Jacques Lacan's theory of reaction and response. Lacan argued that animals can only react through their instincts and are incapable of responding due to the lack of a language system and symbolic order. Derrida rejects complicity in philosophical ideas that maintain animal passivity, as animals are more than mechanically configured beings.

Animals can make one aware of their vulnerabilities and truths. Derrida remarks:

I have trouble repressing a reflex of shame. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety [*malse'ance*] that can come of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. The impropriety of a certain animal nude before the other animal, from that point on one might call it a kind of *animalse'ance*: the single, incomparable and original experience of the impropriety that would come from appearing in truth naked, in front of the insistent gaze of the animal, a benevolent or pitiless gaze, surprised or cognizant.⁶⁹

In parallel with feminist animal care, Derrida invites us to attune to animal responses and discern how these might involve signals expressing that they see us from their own world. Perhaps, they, too, have something to tell us if we learn to practice intimate observation, listening, and openness. Furthermore, reciprocity with animals does not always mean interpreting how they respond to us but examining how we respond to their presence.

⁶⁸ Angelo Quaranta, Serenella d'Ingeo, Rosaria Amoruso, and Marcello Siniscalchi, "Emotion Recognition in Cats," *Animals*, 10, no. 7 (June 28, 2020): 6-10, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10071107>.

⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (Fordham Univ Press, 2008), 5.

One specific framework within the feminist animal care theory is *entangled empathy*, developed by feminist ethicist Lori Gruen. Entangled empathy is a strand of care that integrates affect and cognition, in which humans understand the diverse needs, feelings, desires, and circumstances of particular animals. It fosters a sense of empathic awareness and reflection of the other while recognizing the existing ethical and experiential differences between humans and animals.⁷⁰ Entangled empathy is not simply imagining ourselves in the position of specific animals but realizing that we have been in relationships with animals through our shared lives, motivating us to respond to them according to their specific design.⁷¹ As we attune to the complex behaviors of companion animals or animals in general, we may notice habits or expressions that our limited minds cannot easily grasp. Gruen acknowledges this challenge of not fully comprehending every act they perform, and perhaps they experience the same uncertainty about us. This gap is a great opportunity to be in the liminality of not knowing while still being respectful of them. The lack of understanding on our part should not discourage us from caring for them and creating moments of continuing to learn about them, always in the context of respect for differences and a desire to relate empathetically. Gruen advises that we may not fully access the mystery of their being, but we can somehow be in the space of embracing their nature as they are:

When we carefully observe other animals and learn about their specific ways of life, we can come to see that they adapt to changing circumstances, make choices and resist changes if that is what they decide, and improve their environments, often through collective action. They learn from conspecifics and modify what they learn to suit themselves and their needs. They pursue activities they find rewarding,

⁷⁰ Lori Gruen, *Animal Ethics: Figuring Out What Is Right and Wrong*, Brooks Institute Animal Law Fundamentals (online PDF), 39–40, accessed February 1, 2026, <https://thebrooks institute.org/sites/default/files/article/2023-09/Animal%20Ethics%20-%20Figuring%20Out%20What%20Is%20Right%20and%20Wrong%20by%20Lori%20Gruen.pdf>.

⁷¹ Myisha Cherry, “What an [En]Tangled Web We Weave: Emotions, Motivation, and Rethinking Us and the ‘Other,’” *Hypatia* 32, no. 2 (March 29, 2017): 440, <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12325>.

activities that matter to them. We may not ever have access to what it feels like to live lives like theirs, but we are able to respect that there is something it is like to be them.⁷²

Analyzing animal abilities and characteristics in the context of animal relational reciprocity underscores that what hierarchical Western philosophical traditions claim to be uniquely human qualities are shared among animal species across different modes and domains. These findings reveal that reciprocity in the animal kingdom reflects advanced social cognition, empathy, and moral motivations, highlighting their capacity to enter reciprocal relationships with humans. Feminist animal care reorients our perspectives on how we should best relate with animals—recognizing their sentience as a basis for reciprocal and respectful relationships with them. Donna Haraway discusses the relationship between companion animals and humans, referring to it as “co-constitutive” and “co-evolution,” gesturing to the fact that animals and humans have historically shaped each other’s lives.⁷³ In the same light, companion animals shape our lifestyles, emotions, ways of thinking, and other facets of our being, just as we also shape their behaviors through domestication.

Naming: Restoring Animals in our Anthropocentric Language

I have previously discussed the gifts of animals encompassed by their relational reciprocity through the lens of feminist animal care. To mitigate our systemic subjugation of animals in our language, we should acquire renewed knowledge about them by rejecting the long-held privileging of human superiority and reconsidering that animals also share the same abilities as humans. For this reason, I aim to offer a pastoral intervention to restore the

⁷² Gruen, *Animal Ethics*, 40-41.

⁷³ Haraway, *The Companion Species*, 32.

image and dignity of animals in our linguistic meaning-making. I propose the concept of naming as an intervention that resonates with the vision of *Laudato Si'* toward universal communion and in alignment with feminist animal care.

While watching a TikTok video, a woman addressed her dog, “Jefferson.” I could not help but burst into laughter. In the Filipino context, Jefferson is undeniably a human name that no one would give their companion animal. It was indeed amusing, but it provided me with insights into the significance of naming in human-animal companionship. Naming companion animals with human-associated names impresses upon the fact that the companion animal is considered a living being—*almost* human in some sense. It removes the category of the animal from being treated as an object to being seen as a being with dignity and life. This resonates with Joan Dunayer’s claim that “every sentient being is a someone, not a something.”⁷⁴ Similarly, when Jane Goodall observed chimpanzees in Gombe, she named them David Greybeard, Flo, Goliath, and Frodo, believing that they were not simply data for her research but individuals. In an event, she shared the importance of naming in acknowledging animal individualities, “Every animal has an individuality just like every human being, and without a name the individuality kind of fizzles away.”⁷⁵ Her bold move was not the norm in the academy at that time, as research subjects, such as animals, had to be assigned numbers to maintain objectivity and impartiality. And yet, she paved the way for a more relational research approach with animals that ethologists practice today. Naming is imperative; it recognizes the life within the animal. Calling them by name somehow animates

⁷⁴Joan Dunayer, “On Speciesist Language,” 2.

⁷⁵ College Tour, “Jane Goodall on naming animals during her research,” YouTube video, February 5, 2016, 1:30 to 1:37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Td-a7FcCfm4>.

relationality with them, grounded in respect and care for their existence beyond our anthropocentric assumptions. In line with the reframing of animals, Martha Nussbaum asserts that animals possess intrinsic worth that merits them justice.⁷⁶ This proposition is an invitation to consider animals as subjects of moral concern whose existence provides us with illuminating insights.

In Genesis 2, the first man was granted the privilege of naming all the animals in the Garden of Eden: “The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals” (Gn 2:20). Departing from the traditional illustration of naming as an exercise of power and authority, Arthur Walker-Jones takes on a more relational perspective. Walker-Jones claims that naming implies a kinship between animals and humans in which animals “share practical wisdom and knowledge that is essential to humans in maturing and fulfilling their purpose.”⁷⁷ This may seem to suggest that animals are portrayed as instruments of human vocation, similar to Augustine’s thought, but it implies a balance between pragmatism and reciprocity. It suggests that animals possess wisdom and knowledge

⁷⁶ Martha Nussbaum’s *Capabilities Approach* is an extension of Amartya Sen’s theory of development. Nussbaum posits that each person, endowed with dignity, must flourish in society according to their capabilities. She expands this theory by including animals in her framework. She notes that animals have species-specific capabilities. Her framework demands protecting the dignity of animals as moral subjects. See Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Moral Status of Animals,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 52, no. 22 (February 3, 2006): B6-B-8. Lori Gruen expounded on the list of capabilities of animals that Martha Nussbaum developed with the following: 1) Life – animals are entitled to life even without a “conscious interest.” 2) Bodily Health – animals need to receive proper nutrition and hydration suited to their bodily needs, and to be defended from any threats of abandonment or cruelty. 3) Bodily Integrity – animals must live a life free from abuse, violence, threats to their safety, or any form of suffering. 4) Senses, Imagination, and Thought – animals are entitled to be provided an environment where they can freely tap into their capacity to make choices, communicate, and be themselves, without constricting their natural abilities. 5) Emotions – animals must first and foremost be acknowledged as sentient beings and thus have freedom to form bonds with other beings through love and care. 6) Practical Reason – animals must be given opportunities to apply their cognition to activities they deem appropriate for their enrichment. 7) Play – animals are entitled to evolve in an environment where they can be with their fellow species while enjoying freedom. See Gruen, *Animal Ethics*, 36–37.

⁷⁷ Arthur Walker-Jones, “Naming the Human Animal: Genesis 1–3 and Other Animals in Human Becoming,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 52, no. 4 (2017): 1005–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12375>.

that are vital to human flourishing and growth. Animals, therefore, are not alienated from knowledge production and world-making. They are not mere motivators for humans to perfect their morality based on pain or brutality, but animals extend their charity by allowing humans to gain insights from their presence. In this light, animals are transformed as co-sharers in divine wisdom and design. This also reflects in God's vision of salvation. In the account of the Great Flood, God included all creatures in the saving plan: "I will remember my covenant between me and you and every living creature—every mortal being—so that the waters will never again become a flood to destroy every mortal being" (Gn 9:15). Being incorporated into the community of God, they, too, are promised God's protection and love. Christopher Steck argues that nonhuman creatures participate in the Trinitarian life and are promised redemption by virtue of their relationality with God and their fellow creatures and the goodness they possess; God embraces nonhuman creatures in their unique identity and finitude; and God plays a principal role in the completion and fulfillment of their life.⁷⁸

Shannon Craigo-Snell explains that from a feminist theological perspective, naming is an important act of liberation for women who have been "restricted from the powerful place of naming and subjugated into the space of either being named or living in a reality that has been named by others."⁷⁹ Although women have participated in naming, for instance, naming their children, the authority of naming has been dominated by men. Even in

⁷⁸ Although Steck is convinced that nonhuman creatures are part of God's redemptive plan, he objects to the claim that nonhuman creatures will have the same experience of resurrection, given the differing capacities of nonhuman creatures (e.g., consciousness, sensation, and affect). He posits: "[Due to the] variety of creaturely capacities, it is hard to imagine the eschatological life of all animals simply in terms of the resurrection of each and every one of them... My argument is not that all creatures will share in a resurrection similar to ours (though I am not excluding the possibility), but only that we can hope that at least some of them will." See Christopher Steck, *All God's Animals: A Catholic Theological Framework for Animal Ethics* (Georgetown University Press, 2019), 124.

⁷⁹ Shannon Craigo-Snell, "Feminist Theology, Plant Names, and Power," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030184>.

contemporary contexts, women are excluded from being acknowledged for their inventions and discoveries. Extending this to human-animal relationships, naming affirms the dignity of animals while simultaneously enabling women to exercise their agency in initiating a reciprocal relationship. The feminist reframing of naming, however, does not condone possessive or consumerist forms of animal companionship. Rather, it calls for a relationship that is sensitive to the animal's autonomy and well-being.

Naming calls for stewardship anchored in divine communion. By naming an animal, we acknowledge their personhood and dignity, as if blessing them. Carol Adams notes that naming, among other acts of care and empathy, reflects a human recognition of an animal's inherent individuality. She writes:

Animal defenders extend the notion of personhood to animals. When we watch someone who has a companion animal interact with that animal, we see in that relationship a recognition of that animal's individuality, or in a sense, that animal's personhood: given a name, touched and caressed, a life that interacts and informs another's.⁸⁰

This act plants a seed of respect and honor. While naming does not automatically eliminate the potential for abuse, it encourages a more personal relationship rooted in relationality. Jesus illustrates this intimate relationship in the parable of the Good Shepherd, where the shepherd calls the sheep by name. The shepherd "calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (Jn 10:3). Calling animals by name can change our perspective on them. They become part of our family, home, and priorities. Naming, therefore, animates love, not in a romanticized sense, but a love that empowers human companions to suffer with, empathize with, and become with their companion animals. This love can only arise from

⁸⁰ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 39.

a love grounded in God's love, as Jesus echoed in the Gospel: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (Jn 15:13).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that, in addition to a biased reading of the scriptures, our anthropocentric understanding of animals also influences our language. Animals are reduced to the pronoun *it* categorizing them as objects—devoid of agency, emotions, cognition, and communication. Moreover, across cultures, animals are often instrumentalized as a means of conveying negative messages to insult and oppress humans, as well as other animal species. Those demeaning expressions reflect how little value we give to them. In the same chain of oppression, women, more than men, become targets of crueler animal metaphors. This phenomenon entangles animals and women in multi-layered oppression. To trace how these metaphors are legitimized and reinforced by philosophical and theological traditions, I outlined the claims of Augustine, Aquinas, and Descartes. These anthropocentric traditions do not acknowledge that animals possess intellect, morality, agency, communication, and reciprocity.

To address the shortcomings of these traditions in fully recognizing animal capabilities, I proposed animal reciprocity through the lens of feminist animal care. Animal reciprocity sheds light on the capacities of animals to form reciprocal relationships with their fellow species and humans. Moreover, it is equally significant to move beyond focusing on determining the rights of animals through abstraction by reconsidering the ethics of care that is grounded in mutual care and emotional enrichment established in human-animal companionship.

Lastly, to end with a pastoral intervention, I turned to the concept of naming to allude to the relationality between animals and humans—consistent with the vision of *Laudato Si'* toward universal communion. Through naming, the dignity and capabilities of animals are restored in our communicative devices, while simultaneously enabling women to exercise their agency in the spirit of stewardship. Contrary to hierarchical Western thought, they are not mere *it*, created to simply serve human ends. While we rectify the unjust claims of philosophical and theological traditions about the lack of capacities of animals, it is also worthwhile to embrace animals beyond these human-centered measures by respecting them because of their worth. They are beings with intrinsic worth—co-sharers in God’s creative design—capable of communing with all members of the ecological family.

Ultimately, this chapter bolsters the argument of this thesis-project that animals are not passive beings in their relational connections with humans. In the context of the woman-animal companionship of this work, it is not only the companion animals who benefit from the bond but also the women involved. Moreover, this chapter has attempted to address the rootedness of our demeaning assumptions about animals. The next chapter will discuss Franciscan animal spirituality that proposes how animals develop our spirituality.

Chapter 3

Franciscan Animal Spirituality

*He would call animals, no matter how small, by the name of “brother” and “sister,” forasmuch as he recognized in them the same origin as in himself.*¹ —Bonaventure

Introduction

Ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'* vivifies a ministry that recognizes universal communion as the design of God's creation. It animates a disposition that aims to bring healing to the destruction, division, and alienation brought by anthropocentric ways of humankind toward other species. Having gained insight into the value of animals and their capacity for reciprocal relationships from the previous chapter, we are shown the possibility of building meaningful relationships with them. A profound relationship with animals can help us develop a worldview that orients us toward appreciating creation as our kin. People who have undertaken serious work to deepen their relationship with other species have come to know the world in a different light. Others have accessed sacred sensibilities through meaningful relationships with the environment. A special connection with the environment can allow one to deeply know God—the Creator and Sustainer—and consequently grow in a spirituality that embraces the cosmic life as a unified whole. Saint Francis of Assisi lived a spiritually grounded life, dedicated to ministering to humans and nonhuman species. Thus, his spirituality serves as a model for seeking God or the divine through an embodied and

¹ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, trans. E. Gurney Salter (London and New York: J. M. Dent and E. P. Dutton, 1904), 85.

personal understanding of the whole creation. He befriended animals and treated them as kin—a seemingly different approach to creation and spirituality during his time. His spirituality serves as the bedrock of *Laudato Si'* and its radical teachings. Saint Francis's orientation toward nature continues to attract academics, practitioners, and lay people to learn from his life and unconventional theology.

In this chapter, I will examine Franciscan spirituality, which integrates animals and the environment in the pursuit of knowing and loving God. It is an alternative approach to spirituality, distinct from traditional and Western ways of doing theology, which are often patriarchal, vertical, and anthropocentric. It aims to demonstrate that animals play a role in deepening our spirituality, a central argument of this thesis-project. It will present Franciscan animal spirituality as Christocentric, rooted in gratitude for creation, sensorial and embodied, and kinship-based. These distinct aspects of Franciscan animal spirituality arose from Saint Francis's personal conversion, ascetic life, apostolic work, ordinary encounters with nature, and mystic orientation. All these shaped how Saint Francis viewed, cared for, and defended animals. His animal spirituality is relevant in today's time as we face ongoing global animal cruelty and exploitation.

What is Animal Spirituality?

In the earlier part of this thesis-project, I defined spirituality as “a way of life directed toward deepening and transcending meaning by cultivating well-rounded relationships with the self, God, fellow beings, and the whole creation through embodied and sensorial ways of knowing.” Alternatively, I wish to substantiate this definition in relation to animal spirituality. Accommodating the topic of animal spirituality that Saint Francis embodied

requires stepping back and clarifying what we mean by the term *spirituality*. This word can sound vague, overwhelming, and broad altogether. Besides the definition of the term, the question of who defines it arises. Christianity has successfully associated various meanings with spirituality that may appear ambiguous, but provide a substantial conceptualization of this profound reality. As someone with a Christian theological background, I acknowledge the limitations of my understanding of spirituality. My perspective may not encompass people who hold other beliefs or orientations. Thus, I hope to reiterate that my discernment of spirituality primarily reflects a Christian understanding. Simultaneously, however, I wish to be inclusive by highlighting our universal experience beyond religion.

Jos de Kock provides a contemporary definition of spirituality that has directional and visualized conception. For de Kock, spirituality is “having or searching for a landmark outside or inside of yourself that shines light on your personal life and the world around you and which creates order and gives direction.”² Spirituality in this light is a process of anchoring ourselves in other things to gain a better perspective on life. It implies that we tend to find ourselves in something greater. Sandra Schneiders, a biblical scholar and theologian, has a simple but inclusive definition of spirituality. Schneiders defines it as “the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the horizon of ultimate value one perceives.”³ I prefer this definition because of its secular inclination, but it resonates with the main tenet of ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'* with its focus on “life-integration.” With this definition of spirituality, the target or end goal of the

² Jos De Kock, “Spirituality and Theological Formation: Seven Critical Considerations,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 17, no. 1 (February 16, 2024): 105, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19397909241234294>.

³ Sandra M. Schneiders, “Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 16.

process of transcending could be God, a superior value, or a bigger reality. Spirituality, therefore, is a self-transcending moment that leads one to actualize the ultimate calling imperative of their life experiences. Even if we entertain faith or not, spirituality is a directional orientation that prevents one from being self-contained. It is a capacity to look far beyond what we see on the surface. We are gifted with the ability to exceed physiological and mortal realms and come to understand that there is a world as important, if not more important than ours. Spirituality gravitates us to an epistemological method of knowing that is not confined to our limited rationality. It entails knowing that facilitates a personal and embodied relationality by engaging our senses, producing alternative forms of knowledge. Divination and incantation are often analogous to spirituality as the latter organically illuminates more-than-human paradigms. One significant insight we can draw from this association is that spirituality allows us to blur boundaries of meaning-making. Lastly, spirituality asserts that life is an integrated unit of value that demands to be taken as a whole, not as separate fragments. We are confronted with a diverse, seemingly unrelated series of life experiences. Spirituality gives us the task of patchwork—piecing everything together to arrive at meanings. Therefore, spirituality is the capacity to honor the disentanglements of realities and patch them together to see the unified picture, work through it, and find resonance with it. It can only be done by shifting our gaze from ourselves to something beyond us and submitting to the love extended to us by the world. For Christians, the destiny is God, and all God's manifestations should be maximized to be in a state of being with God. Spirituality is no different from what integral ecology aims to achieve. Integral ecology primarily hopes that humanity recognizes that their world and existence are intimately connected with that of other beings. Animal spirituality, in the context of this research, refers

to being in solidarity with animals as a significant dimension of our being and quest for life. It is a gateway to knowing God or the divine. It magnifies a resolve to honor, defend, and love animals as our kin in our common home. I strongly note, though, that animal spirituality, at least within the bounds of this thesis-project, is not a standalone spiritual work. Rather, it is a complementary limb of the broader scope of spirituality. While everyone can engage in spiritual endeavors, not everyone has nurtured this special offshoot of spirituality, which is why this can be underdeveloped.

Dawn Nothwehr outlines three dimensions that bind Saint Francis's spirituality to creation, which, for me, are closely linked to Franciscan animal spirituality. These are poverty, obedience, and kinship. Saint Francis asserts that creation is dependent on God's sovereign and compassionate love for its existence, which evokes a sense of spiritual poverty. Second, humans ought to submit to creatures by virtue of obedience, just as Jesus humbled himself, taking on human form to be with us. Third, humans and animals are bound by God's love through kinship and familial connections.⁴ Franciscan animal spirituality was shaped by his personal conversion, spiritual poverty, and enduring commitment to God's work. Themes of his spirituality emerged from his humble and compassionate encounters with humans and other creatures alike, originating first from his encounter with Christ. His love for animals sprouted from collective spiritual movements that inspired him to embrace them as his kin, friends, and counterparts. This chapter proposes that Franciscan animal spirituality is Christocentric and gratuitous in nature, sensorial and embodied, and centered on kinship, with animals identified as a co-constitutive force in facilitating spiritual moments.

⁴ Dawn M. Nothwehr, "Benedictine Responsibility and Franciscan Mutuality: Perspectives on the Relationship Between Humans and the Environment," in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Dawn M. Nothwehr (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 408.

Christocentric

In the 1967 article *The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis*, Lynn White Jr. argued that the Judeo-Christian worldview has perpetuated human dominion over creation, causing the exploitation of the environment. However, Lynn remarked that Saint Francis was an exception to this anthropocentric tradition in Christianity, calling him a patron saint of ecologists for his unique approach to the environment.⁵ Eric Doyle rejects the idea that Christianity and its teachings alone are the sole reason for the damage to the earth. Doyle believes that human sinfulness is the root cause of our planet's deterioration. Thus, Western science and technology are insufficient to resolve the environmental crisis that troubles us.⁶ For Doyle, Saint Francis is an exemplar of Christian stewardship, who lived by the commitment of loving and revering God's creation.⁷ Environmental theologians who acknowledge the virtues of Saint Francis would draw the attention of the people away from romantic portrayals of Saint Francis, instead, they would focus on his Christocentric approach. Eric Doyle asserts that there is a missing link when we only view Saint Francis as a "nature lover"⁸ without understanding the deeper source of his love for creation. Doyle

⁵ Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205-1207, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120>. Saint Francis was declared patron saint of ecology by Pope John Paul II in 1979. See John Paul II, *Proclamación De San Francisco De Asís Como Patrono De La Ecología* [Apostolic Letter on the Proclamation of Saint Francis of Assisi as Patron Saint of Ecology], The Holy See, November 29, 1979, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/es/apost_letters/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19791129_inter-sanctos.html. In his message of peace for the World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul linked caring for the environment to fostering peace in the world. He noted Saint Francis as an exemplar of great concern for the environment, dubbed the "Patron of Ecology." See John Paul II, "Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace," The Holy See, January 1, 1990, sec. 16, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html.

⁶ Josef Raischl SFO and André Cirino OFM, eds., *My Heart's Quest: Collected Writings of Eric Doyle, Friar Minor, Theologian* (Canterbury: Franciscan International Study Centre, 2005), 52.

⁷ Raischl SFO and Cirino OFM eds., *My Heart's Quest*, 53.

⁸ Raischl SFO and Cirino OFM eds., *My Heart's Quest*, 46.

uncovers the foundation of Saint Francis's intimate relationship with creatures, most dramatically expressed in the *Canticle of Brother Sun*. Doyle writes:

St. Francis lived always in the presence of the Unutterable Mystery, a contemplative absorbed by the vision of God; and in contemplating the All-Holy and All-Other, he was made like God in seeing that all has been made is very good. Here we have our first insight into the meaning of his love of creatures: If there is such beauty, attraction, power, and alluring sweetness in the world, what must He be like Who is the origin, ground, and source of all that is?⁹

The words expressed in the Canticle utter the beauty and wonder of creation, assisting Saint Francis in contemplating God's mystery. While he had known God through prayer and meditation, creation made the mystery of God more accessible and palpable. It led him to perceive God as the ultimate origin of the beauty of creation, as something as beautiful cannot come from anyone or anything but a divine source. In this spiritual contemplation of Saint Francis, God's "invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made" (Rom 1:20). His love for creatures flowed directly from his contemplation of God, and his love for God flowed directly from his love for creation.

Concurrent with Eric Doyle's position, Edward Armstrong advises against romanticizing Saint Francis's love for nature, leaving out his love for God and his love for all creation as the central part of his compassion for creatures. Armstrong explains that Saint Francis's love for creation was evident in his dedication to Christ, which flowed through the other components of his commitment to God's work.¹⁰

Our age tends to regard Saint Francis romantically as a person who was kind to animals and friendly to birds. Thus, he is represented in statues at the Carceri in

⁹ Raischl SFO and Cirino OFM eds., *My Heart's Quest*, 47.

¹⁰ Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, *Francis of Assisi - the Saint: Early Documents, Vol. 1: Early Documents* (New City Press, 1999), 5-7.

Assisi and the new Guildford Cathedral holding doves in his hands. But when emphasis on this aspect of his character involves failure to stress his complete devotion to this Lord and Master, the outcome is a very distorted picture of the man and his message. His tenderness toward animals was an expression of his dedication to Christ and of his practical compassion for all Creation. Neither men nor worm[s] were excluded. In thinking of him as one who loved nature, we must not lose sight of the man who served Lady Poverty, tended the diseased, and risked or even sought martyrdom among the Saracens.¹¹

Armstrong contradicts a reductionist interpretation of Saint Francis's communion with animals, arguing that it is not merely a fanciful admiration or devotion lacking a strong foundation. Saint Francis's love for animals was a manifestation of sustained love for Christ, connected to his work with the poor and his acceptance of a life of poverty. In the same way, ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'* states that we can only truly build authentic relationships with nature if we have understood, embraced, and loved the person of Christ. A love for animals can blossom and transpire once we have understood the Gospel message of loving our neighbor, which entails loving everyone and everything that is part of God's creation. This is not to deny that having close affinity with animals can be stimulated by a secular motivation or inspiration. In fact, there are animal advocates who do not subscribe to a religion or religious belief who successfully champion animals. We cannot ignore the embodiment of Saint Francis of how faith or spirituality can produce enduring consciousness and sustained commitment to loving nature and animals.

Saint Francis saw creatures as brothers and sisters—kin—of the same source and design. Eric Doyle found ecological semblance in Saint Francis' spirituality, fleshed out by Saint Bonaventure in his doctrine of exemplarism, which posits that all creation reveals

¹¹ Edward Allworthy Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic: The Derivation and Significance of the Nature Stories in the Franciscan Legend* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 6-7.

God.¹² Exemplarism is characterized by created things as “traces”¹³ of God’s divine wisdom expressed most fully and ultimately in Jesus Christ. Saint Francis’s love for creation was always through “concrete” love for persons, animals, and things.¹⁴ The presence of creation graces us with God by showing us beauty, provision, relationality, and community. Creation draws us near to God in a more comprehensible and palpable manner.

Ilia Delio argues that the Incarnation, as opposed to Western primary theological claims, was not only motivated by redemption from sin but by God’s loving nature based on Franciscan theologies of John Duns Scotus and Bonaventure.¹⁵ Delio posits that conceiving

¹² Raischl SFO and Cirino OFM eds., *My Heart’s Quest*, 42.

¹³ Joseph Milne, “Saint Bonaventure and the Divine Order of Creation,” *Temenos Academy Online Papers Summer Term 2020* (2021): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20465726.2021.1923239>. Leonard J. Bowman further expounds on Bonaventure’s cosmic exemplarism, his “mystical understanding of material creatures.” Bonaventure summarizes the metaphysics of exemplarism through three interrelated moments—emanation, exemplarity, and consummation—which together articulate how created things come forth from God and ultimately return to God: 1) Emanation- “It is the nature of the Good to be self-diffusive, to emanate, and so to express itself. Its complete and perfect self-diffusion, emanation, and expression is not the created world but is, rather, the first phase of the inner life of the Trinity. Within the Trinity, it is the Father who is the dynamic source of that emanation, and so it is the Father who is called fountain fullness, *fontalis plenitudo*. This primal self-diffusion of the Father consists of his self-knowledge, a knowledge which is the Son. The Son is then the representation and likeness of the Father, the self-expression of the Father in whom the Father expresses the totality of his being and the totality of what he can produce. The Son is therefore quite aptly called Image, Word, or expression of the Father. The Son is therefore the locus of the divine ideas, the rationes *aeternae* or eternal reasons.” 2) Exemplarity- “Exemplarity, concerns creatures as reflections or expressions of God. It is the doctrine of the relations of expression between God and creatures. It presupposes that God is the prototype of all that exists and that he expresses himself in creatures, so that as a result creatures express the Creator. Every creature is then a divine word, and the universe appears as a book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker.” 3) Consummation- “The purpose or final cause of creation is succinctly summed up so: “The first Principle created this perceptible world as a means of self-revelation so that, like a mirror of God or a divine footprint, it might lead man to love and praise his Creator.” The world is a sign, and so its purpose-if it is not to be abused-is to lead man through it to what it signifies. The world in its ascending levels of reflecting God is like a ladder for man to ascend in the return of God.” See Leonard J. Bowman, “The Cosmic Exemplarism of Bonaventure,” *The Journal of Religion* 55, no. 2 (1975): 181–189.

¹⁴ Raischl SFO and Cirino OFM eds., *My Heart’s Quest*, 77.

¹⁵ Ilia Delio, “Revisiting the Franciscan Doctrine of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 64, no. 1 (February 2003): 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390306400101>. Delio revisits John Duns Scotus’s theology of the primacy of Christ and Bonaventure’s Christ-centered (or Christic) universe to dispute Western theologies that focus on the Incarnation as being primarily driven by redemption from sin. The primacy of Christ in the theology of Scotus emphasizes that God freely chose to reveal the divine out of God’s ultimate love and goodness. Bonaventure, on the other hand, positions Christ as the “noble perfection” of the universe and as self-communicative love. While Delio does not completely refuse the significance of the redemptive work of the

the Incarnation of Christ as primarily redemptive is anthropocentric in nature for being “sin-centered.” A sin-centered understanding of Incarnation is not congruent with evolutionary and cosmic genesis that predate original sin. Delio writes:

Such an emphasis places the weight of Incarnation on fallen humanity rather than on God, highlighting the human need for God to become incarnate. The emphasis on a sin-centered universe, however, is at odds today with the new science. Evolutionary cosmologists point out that our universe is approximately 14 billion years old, and evolutionary biologists indicate that the human species is one of the most recent developments within the history of the universe. Although paleontologists continue to find new evidence of our earliest hominid ancestors, scientists believe that the first humans are no more than a few million years old and our nearest ancestors much less than that. In this respect, the insights of the new science have impelled scholars to seek a new understanding of original sin within an evolutionary universe.¹⁶

Drawing on the Franciscan theology of the primacy of Christ, God freely chose to be with the cosmos by virtue of self-initiating love, and all lives are joined in Christ, the “self-communicative love”¹⁷ of God. In this Christocentric understanding of the Incarnation as opposed to the anthropocentric one, animals are recognized as fellow participants in the evolutionary life of the cosmos sustained by Christ. Denis Edwards likewise interprets the Incarnation of Christ as not only preordained for humanity but for the whole world and all life forms. Edwards argues that “the meaning of the incarnation, of becoming flesh, is not restricted to humanity. The flesh that is embraced by God is not limited to the human. It includes the whole interconnected world of fleshly life, and in

Incarnation, she notes that it is not its primary reason. These teachings of Scotus and Bonaventure are discussed in great detail with a focus on ecological implications by Dawn Nothwehr. For Scotus’s understanding of the Incarnation, see Nothwehr, “Benedictine Responsibility,” 412–413; for Bonaventure’s Christ-centered universe, see Nothwehr, “Benedictine Responsibility,” 409–411.

¹⁶ Delio, “Revisiting the Franciscan Doctrine of Christ,” 16.

¹⁷ Delio, “Revisiting the Franciscan Doctrine of Christ,” 17.

some way, includes the universe to which flesh is related and on which it depends.”¹⁸

Recovering the doctrine of Incarnation from the insights of Franciscan spirituality enables animals to become integral members of cosmic evolution, sharing flesh with God through Jesus Christ, and manifesting the self-giving love of God. A doctrinal retrieval like this indicates that God, through Christ, did not only come for humans but also for other creatures, designating everyone a special place in the planetary family. It affirms God’s creative intelligence and wisdom, which are not only causal but purposeful and co-constitutive. Reflecting upon Scotus’s understanding of the Incarnation, Dawn Nothwehr highlights the role of Christ in elevating human nature by uniting humanity with the divine through him, the Second Person of the Trinity.¹⁹ This truth commits humans to a higher moral and ecological responsibility, as bestowed by a “Christ-like role in the cosmos”²⁰ that urges us to practice stewardship in the spirit of love for Christ. For Saint Francis, love must always be holistic and impartial toward all creatures, with Christ being at the center. His animal spirituality cautions us against being animal-centric while being inhumane to fellow humans. Some individuals are kind and loving to nonhuman species but not to specific groups of people. For instance, Brigitte Bardot, a French film star turned animal activist, was criticized by the public even up to her death for speaking with racial, sexist, homophobic, and Islamophobic undertones.²¹ Despite her legacy of rescuing

¹⁸ Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God’s Redemptive Suffering with Creatures* (Orbis Books, 2019), 58.

¹⁹ Nothwehr, “Benedictine Responsibility,” 412.

²⁰ Nothwehr, “Benedictine Responsibility,” 413.

²¹ Noor Nanji, “Brigitte Bardot: French Cinema Icon Dies Aged 91,” December 28, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly92pr8qryo>.

animals and opposing oppressive practices against them, it was marred by her prejudiced views that maligned Muslim communities, queer people, women, and migrants. Pope Francis describes Saint Francis as an exemplar of holistic love for all creation, demonstrating how “inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.”²² Saint Francis teaches us that all forms of injustice and marginalization must be transformed. Unjust social and ecological structures create *unfreedom* for creation—humans, nonhuman species, and the environments they inhabit.

The Christocentric aspect of Franciscan animal spirituality also lies in how animals mirror Christ and his suffering. Bonaventure tells the story of Saint Francis at the Monastery of San Verecondo in Gubbio, where he witnessed a newborn lamb devoured by a sow. He mourned the innocent lamb whose suffering he paralleled to the suffering of Christ, the Lamb of God:

“[H]e was moved with wondrous pity, and, remembering that Lamb without spot, mourned over the dead lamb in the presence of all, saying: “Woe is me, brother little lamb, innocent creature, setting forth Christ unto men. Cursed be that evil beast that hath devoured thee, and of her flesh let neither man nor beast eat.”²³

The lamb was no longer an ordinary animal in the eyes of Saint Francis. The lamb’s innocence and fate reminded him of Christ’s own suffering. Such parallelism insinuates how accessible Christological imagery was within the personhood and lived experiences of animals. Edward Armstrong observes that Saint Francis was preoccupied

²² Francis, *Laudato Si’* [Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home], The Holy See, June 18, 2015, sec. 10, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

²³ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 86.

with Gospel imagery, that he readily translated into revelations of God through trees, plants, birds, and other creatures.²⁴ Moreover, the pain of the lamb was neither overlooked nor trivialized. Predation is usually seen as a natural part of the food web, where the predator consumes the prey. For Saint Francis, this natural occurrence in the wild was not to be ignored. When animal life is lost, it calls for grief. Christ's death and Passion bring new meaning into the pain and anguish of animals. As they suffer, Saint Francis reminds us to mourn them, honor them, and regard them as symbols of Christ's love and goodness. Indeed, this particular theological insight comes from his contemplation of the Good Shepherd and the sheep—a vivid Gospel allusion of Christ's relationship with animals.²⁵

Gratuitous

Saint Francis's sense of gratitude is directly linked to his commitment to poverty. Bonaventure depicts Saint Francis as a man whose life was surrounded by vanity and pleasure in his youth.²⁶ His adventurous years did not prevent him from seeking God through the poor, a path akin to a life destined for service to the Lord, “for there was divinely implanted in the heart of the young Francis a certain generous compassion toward the poor, the which, growing up with him from infancy, had so filled his heart with kindness that,

²⁴ Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic*, 107. Armstrong points out the different ways in which the Gospel device of the Good Shepherd and the sheep is explored in the book *Fioretti*, a collection of stories about Saint Francis and his companions. It is presumed that it was translated into Italian from an original Latin document, *Actus beati Francisci et sociorum eius*, by Brother Ugolino. In certain chapters, Saint Francis refers to a friar as a “sheep of God,” calls upon Christ as the Good Shepherd, and is likened to a good shepherd who knows his sheep. These varied expressions of the Gospel imagery of the Good Shepherd are landmarks of how Saint Francis's spirituality and the Franciscan movement were built upon Christ's animal-oriented parabolic message. See Brother Ugolino and John M. Sweeney, *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, Paraclete Heritage Edition (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011), chaps. 10, 19, 21.

²⁵ Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic*, 107.

²⁶ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 7.

when he came to be no deaf hearer of the Gospel, he was minded to give unto all that asked of him.”²⁷ In his conversion, he gave up his earthly possessions and accepted his calling.²⁸ After having a vision of the Crucified Christ, Saint Francis experienced a profound spiritual union with Christ. He vowed to a life of poverty, humility, and godliness.²⁹ He accepted Lady Poverty³⁰ as a spiritual ideal for authentic Christian living. By emptying himself of unnecessary possessions, he found more room for relationships, both with humans and creatures. Relationships with all creation did not become a replacement but rather became a fundamental element of his ability to unite with Christ. His compassion for the vulnerable, demonstrated in almsgiving,³¹ generosity toward beggars,³² and carrying other’s burdens³³ was made possible because of his radical detachment from material goods, for “naught would he withhold, neither cloak, nor habit, nor books, nor the very ornaments of the altar, but all these he would, while he could, bestow upon the needy, that he might fulfil the ministry of charity.”³⁴

²⁷ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 7.

²⁸ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 11.

²⁹ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 12.

³⁰ Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic*, 189. Lady Poverty is an allegorical figure of a bride to whom Saint Francis promised to commit himself as a sign of absolute detachment from worldly things and total reliance on God’s provision. In the hagiography of Thomas of Celano, this marriage or union was recorded. Saint Francis speaks of Lady Poverty as a bride full of wisdom and beauty: “I will take a bride more noble and more beautiful than you have ever seen, and she will surpass the rest in beauty and excel all others in wisdom.”

³¹ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 8.

³² Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 13.

³³ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 85.

³⁴ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 85.

Poverty was at the core of his Order, which trained him and his followers to depend on God and recognize God's provision as a gift.³⁵ They were like the birds illustrated by Christ in the Gospel fully depending on God's provision amid poverty, "look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Mat 6:26). Living in poverty, as Willem Marie Speelman puts it, can increase one's capacity to be grateful for everything, especially for relationships, "living without anything of one's own will make one receptive for gifts, for life as a gift. And receptiveness for gifts heightens the capability to estimate the true value of the things that one needs to live, like water, bread, a roof, and most of all: relations."³⁶ Saint Francis fully embraced poverty, which shaped his spiritual disposition. For him, poverty was a "special way of salvation," the foundation of humility and perfection.³⁷ Pope Francis clarifies that this poverty that Saint Francis vowed to live was not mere ascetic renunciation of commodities but an active stance to practice prudence and respect for resources and, ultimately, for created things: "The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled."³⁸

³⁵ There were many instances when Saint Francis and his followers begged for food to continue their work. Saint Francis did not consider poverty as something to be shunned, but a state of being united with the Poor Christ. When the Bishop of Ostia was displeased with his begging, he responded: "My lord, I have done you a great honour, while honouring a greater Lord. For poverty is well-pleasing unto the Lord, and that before all which is a free-will beggary for the sake of Christ. This royal dignity,—that the Lord Jesus took upon Him when for our sakes. He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich, and that He might make them that be truly poor in spirit kings and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven." See Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 69.

³⁶ Willem Marie Speelman, "Nature as a Mystery in a Problem Oriented World: Francis of Assisi's Canticle of the Creatures," *NTT Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion* 77, no. 3 (August 1, 2023): 200, <https://doi.org/10.5117/ntt2023.3.004.spee>.

³⁷ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 69.

³⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 11.

Because of his dependence on God, the resources bestowed upon him were treated as gifts from God, meant to be used only in the service and expansion of his ministry. This virtue ran dynamically through his acknowledgment of every creature as God's gift, not to be harmed or destroyed. Isidro Pereira Lamelas comments that Saint Francis's spirituality is deeply rooted in gratitude, grounded in the recognition of gifts present in creation. This spiritual posture, he notes, stands in direct opposition to cultures of instrumentalization and possessiveness, for "such gratitude is based on the logic of the gift, which is opposed to the logic of utilitarian and mercantilist possession."³⁹

The gratitude of Saint Francis to God reached its fullest expression while enduring infirmities. In his final years, he had been staying in a dark cell as he could not bear the light due to his worsening eye disease. The mice in his cell disturbed him day in and day out, which became a subject of his torment—a "temptation of the devil."⁴⁰ It was out of character for him to hate animals whom he had befriended and adored. His spiritual strength was indeed tested by his declining health and the mischievous mice. Saint Francis sought out God and composed the *Canticle of Brother Sun* that conveyed his gratitude to God. In the canticle, Saint Francis artistically expressed his overflowing gratitude for God's goodness and faithfulness inspired by animate and inanimate creatures. Edward Armstrong explains how this prayer is the highest expression of Saint Francis's gratitude to God:

After Francis prayed that he might endure his infirmities patiently, cheerfulness returned and he reflected that man is amazingly privileged: he is like a slave to whom an emperor has given a kingdom. Inspired by this thought, which involves the acceptance of God, the world, and human life as good and is the foundation of

³⁹ Isidro Pereira Lamelas, "The Canticle of the Creatures by Francis of Assisi (1181/82–1226) and the Care of Our Common Home," *Religions* 15, no. 2 (January 31, 2024): 8, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020184>.

⁴⁰ Jacques Dalarun, *The Canticle of Brother Sun: Francis of Assisi Reconciled* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2016), 29-30.

thankfulness, he sang the Song of the Sun, and then taught it to his companions so that when they halted to preach on their journeyings they might proclaim themselves as God's minstrels and sing together with spiritual jubilation.⁴¹

Aside from his personal assertion of gratitude to God, he composed it for the enlightenment of humanity, whom he believed, lacked a sense of gratitude for God's creation. Saint Francis declares:

Therefore, for his praise, for our consolation and for the edification of our neighbor, I want to write a new Praise of the Lord for his creatures, which we use every day, and without which we cannot live. Through them, the human race greatly offends the Creator, and every day we are ungrateful for such great graces, because we do not praise, as we should, our Creator and the Giver of all good.⁴²

He desired that people would give God praise and thanksgiving God ought to receive for the graces bestowed upon humanity. Similarly, ecological conversion in *Laudato Si'* calls us to cultivate gratitude by embracing creation as not a merited object, but a freely given gift from God, out of generosity and sacrifice.⁴³ Admittedly, this way of life is indeed challenging, as it is tempting to believe that it is not God, but our own labor, that affords us everything we have. Our endless desires for ownership and accumulation can be intoxicating and ultimately self-destructive. At times, even our spiritual pursuits are entangled with selfish desires. Humans seek peace and solitude as part of their spiritual quest. Those who have the means would travel to places where they believe they can attain it. They build homes in mountains, along oceans, or in jungles to appease their longing for depth, often at the

⁴¹ Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic*, 221.

⁴² Dalarun, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, 32. This speech/prayer of Saint Francis also appears in the *Assisi Compilation*, as reproduced in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. See Regis J. Armstrong et al., *Francis of Assisi- The Saint*, 113. The Canticle is estimated to have been written in three stages. The first part, verses 1-9, contains the praises of creation, written at the time Saint Francis was moved to praise God during his illness. The second part, verses 10-11, was in the context of the conflict between the civil and religious authorities of Assisi, with the theme of forgiveness and peace. The last verses, 12-13, were written in the final days of Saint Francis about facing death.

⁴³ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 220.

expense of displacing the original occupants of those areas. A lack of understanding of spiritual yearning can lead to the squandering of the gifts of nature and, in the process, erode our relationships with our fellow creatures. When this imbalance occurs, we become desensitized and deaf to the cries of other creatures because we are preoccupied with filling the void in our hearts. And yet, Saint Francis modeled for us how to approach the longing, not by taking or destroying, but by simply admiring and building relationships with creation.

Franciscan animal spirituality, therefore, affirms the generosity of God, celebrates God's creation as a gift, and lives a life detached from possessions that may distract us from forging relationships with animals. It does not succumb to pleasure that will make animals an object of control, exploitation, and profit. Ultimately, Franciscan animal spirituality stresses the importance of praising God for all the sustenance we receive from creation—a testament to God's love and provision.

Sensorial and Embodied

Saint Francis lived during the Medieval era—an oasis of philosophical and theological thought. The irony is that his theological orientation did not resemble the dominant worldview of his time. Yet, his theology has been quintessential in the face of planetary extinction and environmental conundrum. In retrospect, his moral vision for creation diverged from his contemporaries, not only because of its theological orientation but also because of its sensory, embodied aspect, as proposed by Keith Warner.⁴⁴ Bonaventure

⁴⁴ I was struck by the description “affective and direct sensory experience” that Keith Warner used to signify the Franciscan tradition of experiencing creation. It echoes the salient proposition of feminist animal care, which emphasizes the role of human affective domains in dealing with animals. This has led me to ponder what this means for human-animal companionship. Honestly, I had had opportunities to interact with animals before, but none permanently made me love animals profoundly until Pancake came. It is a shame to admit this, but I presume it was because of my lack of affective and sensory connection with them. To illustrate my point, I want to talk about Lucia, the dog my friend Sharen gave to me. At that time, I was totally ignorant of how to

refers to this embodied and sensorial experience of creation as the meeting of “macrocosm” and “microcosm” in which creation, as the macrocosm, enters into the soul of the person “through the gateways of the five senses according to the taking in, finding pleasure in, and analyzing of those perceptible beings.”⁴⁵ Only through our senses can we comprehend the grandeur of creation, eliciting different emotions that lead us to inquire about the truths of life. No matter how vast and incomprehensible it may be, some truths can always be perceived. The meeting point of the two is a prerequisite for deepening our understanding of the substantial truth of the Creator.

The theology of Saint Francis deviated from the sophisticated abstract philosophy of his time. He employed sensorial metaphors and devices to convey his teachings through his actual embodiment. Saint Francis’s treatment of animals was not different from his pastoral approach to humans. His view of animals centered on the Incarnation of Jesus present in all forms of life.⁴⁶ This Christocentric model of spirituality resulted in experiencing the material

properly care for dogs. I left her in my mother’s care. I hardly gave her attention. It was a lost opportunity to know her well. Because of the distance between us, I did not develop my love for animals. This made me realize that even though we are surrounded by hundreds of animals, if we do not intentionally interact with them, we cannot develop a profound love for them—enough to motivate us to have a moral stance to protect them. We should facilitate affective connections with them by activating our senses: sight, smell, touch, and hearing. When we look at them intently and observe their habits and quirks, we realize that they are a ball of sunshine, with so much innocence and simplicity in them. When we touch them, we learn which part of their body is ticklish or in pain. When we are familiar with their smell, we know when they already need a bath or when they are unwell. Some of them emit special smells due to fear or anxiety. When we attune to their somatic and sound responses, we can learn their language to comprehend what they wish to communicate. While proximity helps forge a relationship with animals, it should go beyond that by befriending them, informed by our affective and sensorial domains. Saint Francis masterfully performed this by establishing an authentic relationship with every animal he found, regardless of type. See Keith Warner, “Franciscan Environmental Ethics: Imagining Creation as a Community of Care,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2011): 143-160, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23562646>.

⁴⁵ Regis J. Armstrong, “A Guide for the Mind into God,” in *Into God: An Annotated Translation of Saint Bonaventure’s Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv296mnqx.5>.

⁴⁶ Warner, “Franciscan Environmental Ethics,” 148-149.

world through embodied sensorial affects, incorporating all senses.⁴⁷ For Saint Francis, connecting with animals meant observing them, singing with them, touching them, healing them, blessing them, praising God with them, and learning from them—joyfully thrilled by their wit. Such a stance is a vital assertion that unlocks how animal spirituality can be honed in us. In the following sections, I will outline various instances in which Saint Francis epitomized a sensorial and embodied animal spirituality.

Saint Francis had a gift of commanding animals.⁴⁸ It is necessary to note that his ability to make animals obey him was not through the exertion of power or intimidation. It was his loving approach to them that made them feel safe around him. His voice and touch reassured even wild creatures. On one occasion at Greccio, a rabbit was brought to him, and it flew into his arms at a mere call. He fondled the animal, which felt safe, as if the creature regarded Saint Francis as its mother. When animals heard his voice, it was not a sound of terror but a comforting and familiar tone that drew them to him affectionately, similar to how the rabbit “perceived the tenderness of his heart; wherefore at length, by his command.”⁴⁹ He acted lovingly toward animals, which made it easy for them to open up and trust. Saint Francis’s positive encounters with animals prove that animals are good judges of character; they can sense if we have a good intention or if we want to inflict harm on them.

Numerous accounts attest to the gift of healing of Saint Francis. He healed a leper, a sick religious man, and blind people, and performed other miraculous acts of healing. He extended this gift to animals. In the Province of Rieti, a plague caused sheep and oxen to fall

⁴⁷ Warner, “Franciscan Environmental Ethics,” 149.

⁴⁸ Candide Chalippe, *The Life and Legends of Saint Francis of Assisi*, trans. Hilarion Duerk, O.F.M. (Chicago: Benziger Brothers, 1918), 395.

⁴⁹ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 88.

ill. Saint Francis sprinkled holy water on the sheep and oxen, and they recovered from sickness.

...Francis, who at that time was sojourning there, and to sprinkle it over all the animals...he sprinkled therewith the sheep and oxen that were diseased. Wondrous to relate, so soon as the sprinkling, were it but a drop, fell upon the sick animals as they lay on the ground, they recovered their former strength, and got up forthwith, and, as though they had felt no sickness, hastened unto the pastures!⁵⁰

In this particular instance of healing, Saint Francis ministered to animals in the same manner he ministered to people. He felt their affliction and found their suffering unsettling. His demeanor revealed his concern for animals, affirming that they, too, are deserving of receiving the highest care from humans. This work of Saint Francis supports the sacrifices of human companions to save the lives of their companion animals—accompanying them through their illness and death. While some may dismiss this act as something excessive, with the reason “it’s just a pet,” Saint Francis challenges this perspective. In Franciscan animal spirituality, witnessing an animal in peril should disturb us at the core, respond to it to the best of our ability, and not cling to apathy.

Aside from healing sick animals, he also prayed over and blessed them. This level of compassion and concern for animals honors them as living beings in need of spiritual care. In one instance, Saint Francis prayed over a bird, “then he, lifting his eyes unto heaven, remained for a long space in prayer, and, after a long hour returning unto himself as though from afar, gently bade the little bird depart, and praise the Lord.”⁵¹ It affirms that they are not mere properties or ornaments but they are animate beings whose welfare must also be lifted to God’s care. The feast day of Saint Francis, celebrated every October 4, has become a

⁵⁰ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 142.

⁵¹ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 88-89.

global gathering of animals and their human companions for the blessing of pets. It confirms that human companions desire God's protection and care for their companion animals.

Susan Crane suggests that Saint Francis not only interacted and communed with animals, but he also made them part of his worship of God.⁵² Aside from protecting and loving them, he worshipped with them. Francis saw animals not just as instruments of devotion to God,⁵³ but as co-participants in worshipping God. One incident was when he preached to birds near Bevagna with these words:

My little bird sisters, you should praise your Creator because he has given you the gift of flight and freedom, colorful clothing, food, and water that you never need to sow, and such beautiful voices. The air is all yours! The mountains and crags and trees are yours! God gives you all that you need. Your Creator loves you. Therefore, always be grateful and praise him.⁵⁴

Speaking to them in this manner was a recognition of the birds' capacity to understand the treasure of God's Word and their ability to connect with the Creator mystically. Often, we assume that animals are incapable of comprehending our language. Yet in this moment, Saint Francis silenced our mistaken assumptions about animals. They are not only capable of communing with us but also with God. One striking detail of his preaching to the birds is how sensorial the content is that arises from their day-to-day life experience. One of the basic principles of effective preaching is understanding the context of the assembly. Saint Francis successfully delivered a message that spoke to the survival of the birds sustained by God. His precise observations of their life patterns suggest that he knew them very well. This creative

⁵² Susan Crane, "Francis of Assisi on Protecting, Obeying, and Worshipping with Animals," *Exemplaria* 33, no. 4 (2021): 369–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10412573.2021.1997023>.

⁵³ Anthropocentric philosophical and theological traditions, outlined in the previous chapter, tend to view animals as apparatuses for worshipping God. And yet, for Saint Francis, animals are not simply ancillary bodies to evoke spirituality, but they are integral members of the worshipping body of God.

⁵⁴ Brother Ugolino and Sweeney, *The Little Flowers*, 39.

expression of evangelization to these animal creatures was pivotal, which tied together Saint Francis's earlier fervor for animals, ascetic life, missionary work, secular life, and liturgical sensibilities, which later influenced his Order.⁵⁵

On another occasion, Saint Francis was accompanied by a lamb while presiding over Mass at Saint Mary of the Little Portion:

For when it heard the Brethren chanting in the choir, it too would enter the church, and, unbidden of any, would bend the knee, bleating before the altar of the Virgin Mother of the Lamb, as though it were fain to greet her. Furthermore, at the elevation of the most holy Body of Christ in the solemn Mass, it would bend its knees and bow, even as though the sheep, in its reverence, would reprove the irreverence of the undevout, and would incite Christ's devout people to revere the Sacrament.⁵⁶

The lamb behaved as though it understood a Eucharistic celebration and demonstrated reverence to the Body of Christ. The lamb embodied a form of reverence worth emulating by humans. Saint Francis not only affirmed the capacity of animals to praise God but also recognized their ability to exemplify a reverence that, at times, surpasses human devotion. In contemporary contexts, some parishes allow animals or pets to join in liturgical celebrations. For instance, at St Mary's Church in Beverley, East Yorkshire, a dog joined the parish choir in singing Christmas carols.⁵⁷ In Mexico, animals are blessed every January 17th in celebration of the Feast of Saint Anthony the Abbott, where animals participate in a Eucharistic celebration.⁵⁸ Accommodating animals in liturgical celebrations embodies a community that welcomes

⁵⁵ Roger D. Sorrell, *St. Francis Of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes Toward the Environment* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 59-60.

⁵⁶ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 87.

⁵⁷ "Deck the Howls: Dog Joins in With Festive Choir," *BBC*, December 22, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/videos/c1w94rvn9jqo>.

⁵⁸ Maria Teresa Hernández, "Blessings for Dogs? Bring Them to Mexico City's Cathedral and St. Anthony Will Do the Rest," *AP News*, January 17, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/blessing-pets-mexico-city-st-anthony-abbot-9af44a6af7a36c30ef0e8c332e243cbb>.

everyone—both human and nonhuman species—as part of the Body of Christ enjoined to worship God.

Saint Francis also had the gift of taming distressed animals. In Gubbio, a wolf had begun devouring both animals and humans due to severe hunger. The townsfolk had a violent approach. They carried weapons, but failed to cease the wolf. So Saint Francis boldly faced the wolf, forgiving its sins with the promise of being provided for by the town:

Brother wolf, you have harmed many people and creatures in this place, cruelly destroying and killing. You deserve to be put to death like a murderer would be, but brother wolf, I want to make peace between you and the people of Gubbio. You must not harm them, and they will forgive you for your past sins... since you agree, I further promise that the people of Gubbio will feed you every day for as long as you live. You will never again go hungry, leading you to commit these crimes of yours but again—to be sure—I want you to promise that you will never hurt any creature, will you?⁵⁹

This is a heartwarming approach to animals that display aggressive behavior. Instead of killing the wolf, Saint Francis sought to understand the creature's behavior. The wolf acted out of hunger, not viciousness. Rather than villainizing the wolf, Saint Francis responded to the animal with compassion. He knew that the community had failed to care for it. He spoke to the wolf, understood the wolf's behavioral patterns, and reconciled the wolf with the community. Simultaneously, he made the community accountable to the wolf, ensuring that the wolf would never be hungry again.⁶⁰ Animals behave a certain way not because they are inherently violent, aggressive, or dumb, but because they, too, experience temporal circumstances that alter their behavior. For instance, dogs may bark at strangers because of

⁵⁹ Brother Ugolino and Sweeney, *The Little Flowers*, 53.

⁶⁰ This is a salient reflection point about caring for animals. Caring for animals is a community effort that we must all take seriously. As we interact and co-create with them, we must attend to their needs and guarantee that we are not depriving them of food and other sustenance by respecting their habitats and food resources. *Laudato Si'* discusses a similar topic: the loss of biodiversity of species. See Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 32-42.

fear. Hens can be fierce toward humans due to their protective maternal instincts. However, we tend to interpret these types of behavior negatively, leading to bloodshed. In some zoos or circuses, animals are killed for attacking humans without consideration of the conditions that prompted such behavior. Some animals in these environments suffer food deprivation, physical punishment, or intimidation when they fail to perform what they are taught.⁶¹ Like humans, animals navigate their surroundings to survive. When human interference occurs, they heighten their defenses to protect themselves, their pack, their resources, and their territories. The depths of their lives can only be comprehended if we take the time to know them and be with them.

One might think that Saint Francis's mastery of dealing with animals is unattainable because of his extraordinary gifts. This assumption, however, is far from true. While his connection with animals was indeed remarkable, it was something he cultivated by embodying a disposition that drew him closer to nature, allowing him to observe animals, which started before his conversion. Roger Sorrell believes that Saint Francis's hermetic retreats, which led to his intimate encounters with animals, were key dimensions in his development of animal-oriented spirituality.⁶² An ascetic life kept him spiritually and ecologically grounded, in which he spent his time in solitude, prayer, contemplation, thanksgiving, and apostolic work⁶³ that fully incorporated him into the world and sustained his awareness of nature's life. However, simply positioning ourselves at the center of life unfolding in nature is not adequate to penetrate the truths of animals. It requires opening our

⁶¹ People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), "*Animals in Entertainment: Circuses, SeaWorld, and Beyond*," PETA, accessed December 29, 2025, <https://www.peta.org/issues/animals-in-entertainment/>.

⁶² Sorrell, *St. Francis Of Assisi and Nature*, 42.

⁶³ Sorrell, *St. Francis Of Assisi and Nature*, 42.

senses to their awe and wonder, allowing them to teach us about life. Otherwise, we will fail to recognize their beauty, their affinity with us, and our reciprocal exchange of life wisdom with them. Pope Francis reminds us of this sensorial and embodied approach:

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, and ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast if we feel intimately united with all that exists then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously.⁶⁴

To partake in the beauty and wisdom of animals, we must engage all our senses as we commune with them. We must observe them closely as Saint Francis saw the birds' ability to praise the Lord, the colors of their feather, and their freedom in the wild. We must listen to them as Saint Francis listened to their songs, prayers, anguish, and cries for help. We must touch them as Saint Francis welcomed them into his bosom, fondled them, and healed them. We must smell them as Saint Francis sensed their fear, anxiety, and reluctance even from miles away. Finally, we must let ourselves be taught by them: how to praise God, how to depend on God, and how to be enchanted by the beauty of nature.

Kinship-Based

If addressing the earth elements, celestial bodies, waters, flowers, animals as "brothers" and "sisters" seems surprising in today's time, despite the rise of (semi)-reconciled⁶⁵ environmental ethics, how much more radical must this have been for medieval societies? Calling creatures in this endearing way is not something natural for most of us,

⁶⁴ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 11.

⁶⁵ The notation on "semi-reconciled" explicates that while different fields of knowledge have advanced our environmental ethics, there is still room for addressing the dilemmas on certain issues in the grey areas. For instance, debates are still ongoing regarding ethical animal consumption, mining, tourism, deforestation, and similar environment-related matters.

more so for the people of Saint Francis's time. Even if all creation exists on the same plane, distance persists, whether through unequal power relations, lack of affinity, exploitative and consumerist structures, or sheer indifference. Saint Francis's signature intimate addressing of other creatures introduced a transformed relationality with the nonhuman world. Such is not a performative gesture of closeness but an authentic affirmation of a relationship.

In Filipino culture, we address the people we encounter as "*ate*" (older sister) and "*kuya*" (older brother). These terms are also used for household workers. These titles may be a convenient name substitute if the name is unknown (specifically for people we meet in public), but these function as honorifics to signify respect. It implies that non-blood individuals can be family. Similarly, Saint Francis professed other creatures as his siblings—his kin—which insinuates, "You are my family."⁶⁶ It was Saint Francis's declaration of his acceptance of the creatures as his own family after giving up his own to embark on an ascetic life.⁶⁷

Keith Warner argues that the Franciscan spirituality surpasses the Genesis stewardship model with the Franciscan "familial model" of relating to Creation⁶⁸—a rendition of the kinship-based spirituality of Saint Francis. This familial model is not only about practicing responsibility over creation for practical interests, but it also instills in us dutiful care for creation because we belong to the same family. Accentuating stewardship

⁶⁶ The choice of "you" over "we" (as in "we are family") connotes a stronger message for me. Directly telling the other that they are your family suggests acceptance at the level of creature-to-creature kinship.

⁶⁷ Thomas A. Nairn, "St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of Creatures* as an Exercise of the Moral Imagination," in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Dawn M. Nothwehr (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 177-178.

⁶⁸ Keith Douglass Warner, "Get Him Out of the Birdbath!," in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Dawn M. Nothwehr (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 369.

with kinship or the familial model can potentially increase responsibility among us. The relationship we have with creation is not only defined by what we receive from it but by an intimate connection that originates from the Giver of life. When we have a deep bond with the members of creation, it is hard to ignore their suffering. The *Canticle of Brother Sun* ruminates on this familial model for understanding our relationship with creation. It is only through the spirit of fraternity that we can truly grasp its meaning, affirming that we have the same Father, through Christ.⁶⁹ Our kinship with other species became possible because of the Incarnation of Christ. Besides being gifted with sacred nature, we have been initiated into the universal family. This doctrinal truth about our relationality dissolves power hierarchies between creatures as we become brothers and sisters in Christ, evident in the concept of Franciscan *cortesía*. Aside from his pre-conversion love for nature, Saint Francis also infused his chivalric wisdom into his kinship with creation.⁷⁰ He exemplified the Franciscan *cortesía*, which means deference or respect toward others, especially those of lower status.⁷¹ In chivalry, respect is commonly reserved for authorities; Saint Francis extended this to creatures deemed less important by treating them as family. His attitude toward animals was consistent with Franciscan *cortesía* as he provided for them, connected with them emotionally and spiritually, and defended them.

Dawn Nothwehr's *cosmic mutuality*, defined as "the sharing of 'power-with'⁷² by and among the Creator, human beings, all earth elements, and the entire cosmos in a way that

⁶⁹ Dalarun, *The Canticle of Brother Sun*, 55.

⁷⁰ Sorrell, *St. Francis Of Assisi and Nature*, 72.

⁷¹ Sorrell, *St. Francis Of Assisi and Nature*, 72.

⁷² "Power-with" is a permutation of the different framings of power. In feminist thought, "power-with" is a relational or communal generating of power that contrasts "power over" (dominance) and "power to" (the

recognizes their interdependence and reverences all,”⁷³ fits squarely with the notion of kinship of Saint Francis. It redresses the disproportionate power relations inculcated by hierarchical ideals that separate humans and nonhuman species. God sharing divinity with the cosmos constitutes a disposition of cooperation, reciprocity, empathy, and equality across all members of the cosmos. It illuminates that kinship supports the thriving of each other and regards members of the universal family as equal counterparts. Cosmic mutuality reaffirms our dependence on each other, that the glory of one is because of the other, and the extinction of one is the death of another. It eliminates competition among species and signifies the symbiotic relationship of all creation. As kin in the economy of life, not only humans can do good to other creatures. Animals can rouse our morality and spirituality—edifying us—as Saint Francis witnessed our sister birds praising the Creator.⁷⁴ Saint Francis’s affinity with them was a mutual relationship, according to Thomas Murtagh. Saint Francis found God in the animals he encountered, and the animals he cared for returned his kindness. It is presumed that such a dynamic with animals was not a common practice in the 13th century,⁷⁵ to debate that Saint Francis acted freely, and the animals exhibited natural behavior toward

ability to do something). It highlights a collective, shared, and non-hierarchical movement or utilization of power.

⁷³ Nothwehr, "Benedictine Responsibility," 417. See also Dawn Nothwehr, *Mutuality: A Formal Norm for Christian Social Ethics* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1998), 233.

⁷⁴ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 89.

⁷⁵ Thomas Murtagh, "St. Francis and Ecology," in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Dawn M. Nothwehr (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 147-148. This was a response to Edward Armstrong's skepticism about the interaction of animals with Saint Francis, alluding to it as "inventions" in the words of Murtagh. In his book, Armstrong implies that the affectionate response of animals to Saint Francis was "piety interpreted and exaggerated" by his biographers. See Armstrong, *Saint Francis: Nature Mystic*, 192.

him. This information undergirds that nonhuman species participate in the thriving of this kinship. They reciprocate our love in a manner that can best show their acceptance of us.

Mary Frohlich, in her examination of kinship and the environment, adopts Donna Haraway's definition of kinship or "making kin." To make kin is to forge relationships with everyone and be accountable to them, even those with whom we have made a distance⁷⁶—the oppressed, the secluded, and the forgotten across all species as a preferential option. It entails blurring the boundaries of social constructs that marginalize beings whose identities are not socially recognized or are treated as minorities. Such identities are often based on factors such as gender identity, disability, race, age, and others. These classifications are conveniently applied to nonhuman species. Human companions tend to prefer male animals due to concerns about female animals becoming pregnant. Aging animals and animals with disabilities are frequently overlooked for adoption because of their health conditions. Likewise, breed and geographical origin significantly influence an animal's adoptability. To be in kinship with others is to look past not just anatomical and social differences but to question the existence of systems that maintain discrimination and division within our family, leading us to perceive our counterparts as less than the rest of us. Thus, the bearing of Christ in all of creation becomes a point of reference for overcoming our tendency to feel superior to other beings, as modeled by Saint Francis.

Saint Francis's animal spirituality forwards a kinship-based connection with animals centered on the person of Christ, the wellspring of charity, tenderness, empathy, compassion,

⁷⁶ Mary Frohlich, *The Heart at the Heart of the World: Re-visioning the Sacred Heart for the Ecozoic Era* (Orbis Books, 2024), 110–111. Donna Haraway defines "kin" as "those who have an enduring mutual, obligatory, non-optional, you-can't-just-cast-that-away-when-it-gets-inconvenient, enduring relatedness that carries consequences. I have a cousin, the cousin has me; I have a dog, a dog has me." See Steve Paulson, "Making Kin: An Interview With Donna Haraway," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 6, 2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/making-kin-an-interview-with-donna-haraway/>.

and awe. His natural inclination to animals was developed and deepened by his love for Christ, which moved him to become a brother, defender, and co-worshipper to them.

Bonaventure beautifully captures the aspect of his spirituality with this text:

When he bethought him of the first beginning of all things, he was filled with a yet more overflowing charity, and would call the dumb animals, howsoever small, by the names of *brother* and *sister* forasmuch as he recognized in them the same origin as in himself. Yet he loved with an especial warmth and tenderness those creatures that do set forth by the likeness of their nature the holy gentleness of Christ, and in the interpretation of Scripture are a type of Him. Ofttimes he would buy back lambs that were being taken to be killed, in remembrance of that most gentle Lamb Who brooked to be brought unto the slaughter for the redemption of sinners.⁷⁷

Conclusion

Saint Francis channeled God's love to animals as animals mirrored God's love to him. His life with animals proves that animals can nurture one's spirituality. Saint Francis's spirituality can be rightfully called "Franciscan animal spirituality"—an offshoot of his broader spiritual framework that directly engaged with nature. Franciscan animal spirituality is rooted in Saint Francis's entire spiritual navigation of God through creation. It is first and foremost Christ-centered. As Saint Francis was initiated into the mysteries of God through Christ, creation became a catalyst to ponder God's love, beauty, order, wisdom, and generosity. Everything in creation was perceived with a sense of gratitude. By embracing a life of poverty, he was able to recognize the gift of creation more clearly. By emptying himself, he became more available to receive creation into his life, calling them "brothers" and "sisters." His kinship with them was founded in deference, mutuality, and filial love. He practiced sensorial and embodied attention in dealing with animals. He learned their language of praise, hunger, illness, and fear. And because of his loving stance in communing

⁷⁷ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 85.

with them, he received love in return. Indeed, Saint Francis's profound encounters with animals ascertain that animals can evoke human spirituality by bringing us into their world and showing us the goodness and wisdom of the Creator. His holiness, with the contribution of his animal friends, enabled him to do wondrous deeds for them, worth emulating. Bonaventure remarks, "must we think on the holiness of this blessed man, that was of such wondrous sweetness and might as that it conquered cease wild beasts, tamed woodland creatures...For of a truth it is this piety...profitable unto all things."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Bonaventure, *The Life of Saint Francis*, 92-93.

Chapter 4

How Companion Animals Shape Environmental Consciousness

“Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened.”¹
– Anatole France

Introduction

Humans have damaged, abused, and dominated creation, but ecological conversion seeks to initiate a conversion that transforms our relationship with nature. Here, I claim that companionship with animals is indeed a ministry that can liberate us from selfish and greedy ways through compassionate and responsible interactions with them. Being graced with the presence of companion animals, they bring us into their world, showing us who they are, as we bring them into our homes.

This chapter aims to illustrate how sharing a close affinity and fellowship with companion animals can be an impetus for environmental consciousness, which responds to the argument of this thesis-project. It is of great importance to note that human-animal companionship is a controversial topic, raising ethical and environmental concerns. Without a well-balanced theoretical and ethical framework, these material concerns can undermine the argument that companion animals can enrich our environmental consciousness.

¹ This quote from Anatole France, a Nobel Laureate in 1921, serves as an epigraph in Lynda Rutledge’s history-inspired novel about the first two giraffes that migrated to San Diego in 1938. See Lynda Rutledge, *West With Giraffes: A Novel* (Lake Union Publishing, 2021).

Critical to this dialogue is to inquire whether caring for companion animals is indeed a liberatory practice for both animals and humans. Thus, I aim to provide substantial arguments that caring for companion animals can outweigh the drawbacks posed by “pet keeping”² or domestication and can lead to a deeper appreciation of animals and other nonhuman species if practiced ethically and sustainably, which can inspire one to practice ways that contribute to the environment positively.

First, I will present some arguments against caring for companion animals from environmental and ethical perspectives. Second, I will discuss how caring for companion animals can foster environmental awareness through the “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis. Third, I will discuss practical implications of this hypothesis for ecological conversion. Specifically, I will discuss the upholding of the tenets of integral ecology or the interdependence of members of ecological family and socio-cultural and political environments. These are embedded in the joint thriving and suffering of the whole ecological family. As an intervention, specific ways by which the Church can support human companions in forging sincere and embodied relationships with their companion animals are proposed.

² ‘Pet keeping’ is the commonly used term for human-animal companionship in an arrangement where humans care for companion animals to nurture, domesticate, and care for them in close proximity, presented in the value of companionship and care. By virtue of the recovery of a positive human-animal companionship, I depart from this term as it connotes ownership and control-oriented meanings. I use the term “companionship” to denote the binding relationship between the two, synonymous with kinship, fellowship, and affinity.

Criticisms of Caring for Companion Animals

Impacts of Companion Animals on the Environment

A study suggests that not adopting a dog is one of the most effective ways of reducing carbon emissions, alongside reducing air travel and eating lower-carbon meats.³ This insinuates that dogs tend to generate significant carbon emissions. Carbon emissions from the transport of companion animals to dog parks significantly contribute to the impacts of climate change. In a study on companion animals' travel to dog parks in Seattle, in the United States, around 1.6 million miles of vehicle travel were recorded.⁴ A 2025 study states that dog caretaking has implications for climate change. This is due to their meat-heavy diets, organic waste (feces and urine) that is harmful to soil and water, and the plastic waste involved in their daily care.⁵ In a study on dogs and cats in the United States, it is estimated that these companion animals consume around 33% of the animal-derived energy consumed by humans.⁶ In the European Union (EU), it was found that dog caretaking accounts for around 7% of the annual carbon footprint of an average EU citizen.⁷ It was observed by the

³ Danielle Goldwert et al., "Climate Action Literacy Interventions Increase Commitments to More Effective Mitigation Behaviors," *PNAS Nexus* 4, no. 6 (June 1, 2025): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgaf191>.

⁴ Don MacKenzie and Hyun Cho, "Travel Demand and Emissions From Driving Dogs to Dog Parks," *Transportation Research Record Journal of the Transportation Research Board* 2674, no. 6 (May 31, 2020): 291–96, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361198120918870>.

⁵ Antonina Krawczyk, Bożena Nowakowicz-Dębek, Anna Chmielowiec-Korzeniowska, and Hanna Bis-Wencel, "Environmental Pawprint of Dogs as a Contributor to Climate Change," *Animals* 15, no. 21 (2025): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani15213152>.

⁶ Gregory S. Okin, "Environmental Impacts of Food Consumption by Dogs and Cats," *PLoS ONE* 12, no. 8 (August 2, 2017): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0181301>.

⁷ Kim Maya Yavor, Annekatrin Lehmann, and Matthias Finkbeiner, "Environmental Impacts of a Pet Dog: An LCA Case Study," *Sustainability* 12, no. 8 (April 22, 2020): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12083394>.

study conducted in China that the food consumption of both cats (27.4 million) and dogs (51.8 million) relying on commercial dry food is comparable to the dietary ecological footprint of the Chinese population.⁸ In Japan, the average food consumption of a regular dog is equivalent to the dietary ecological footprint of a Japanese person.⁹ What we can surmise from these studies is that companion animals' ecological footprints tend to approximate those of humans. Indeed, companion animals are inevitably enrolled in the economics of care. They are co-consumers to some extent, contributing to climate change beyond their biological waste.

The data outlined above, however, can be a trap for conceiving companion animals as ecological liabilities; rather than acknowledging the systemic effects of consumerist and capitalist structures that shape our relationship with companion animals. Donna Haraway situates companion animals within the consumption and commodification of humans. We entangle them in our consumerist practices, as they receive veterinary care, animal supplies, and other goods and services that support their well-being. Conversely, Haraway insists against framing them as mere commodities, highlighting that they are living and breathing beings with whom we exchange relational and familial bonds.¹⁰ Although Haraway's positionality is not explicitly about environmental crises, her framework conveys an important insight. While companion animals are now implicated in industries that worsen climate change, we cannot simply reduce them as objects of consumerism and thereby

⁸ Vivian Pedrinelli et al., "Environmental Impact of Diets for Dogs and Cats," *Scientific Reports* 12, no. 1 (November 17, 2022): 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-22631-0>.

⁹ Bingtao Su and Pim Martens, "Environmental Impacts of Food Consumption by Companion Dogs and Cats in Japan," *Ecological Indicators* 93 (June 20, 2018): 1043-49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2018.06.015>.

¹⁰ Donna Jeanne Haraway, *When Species Meet* (U of Minnesota Press, 2008), 45-67.

absolve ourselves of environmental accountability. Moreover, we can no longer alter their evolutionary nature or remove them from our social realities, as they have become dependent on humans for survival. What we can do is to adapt our practices of care in ways that are ethical and environmentally sustainable. Our entangled relationships with our companion animals in the face of a serious environmental crisis concern *all* of us. It places pressure on humans to reevaluate the capitalist cultures of care and consumption that extend to human-animal companionship. This requires adopting alternatives and sacrificing convenience. The Animal Humane Society suggests more sustainable caregiving practices, including considering plant-based food resources and reducing meat consumption (favoring lower-impact options such as fish and poultry), disposing of organic waste directly in the trash, using non-industrially produced litter alternatives (e.g., wheat, wood shavings, walnut shells), and opting for non-toxic, recyclable materials for toys and grooming products.¹¹ With regard to transport, it is more ecologically responsible to walk companion animals to nearby (dog) community parks, which can both reduce carbon emissions and enhance health benefits¹² as well as familiarity with one's local environment.

Besides consumerist cultures of care, humans are also accountable for how companion animals partake in shared ecological and spatial relationships with their fellow beings to foster the thriving of everyone in nature. Studies show that companion animals threaten the existence of other animals. Cats have been found threatening the survival of other animal species due to their predatory behavior.¹³ Similarly, dogs have been found

¹¹ Animal Humane Society, *Five Ways to Reduce Your Carbon Pawprint*, accessed January 31, 2026, <https://www.animalhumanesociety.org/resource/five-ways-reduce-your-carbon-pawprint>.

¹² MacKenzie and Cho, "Travel Demand and Emissions," 295.

¹³ R. Kays et al., "The Small Home Ranges and Large Local Ecological Impacts of Pet Cats," *Animal Conservation* 23, no. 5 (March 11, 2020): 516–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/acv.12563>.

killing other animal species. Their mere presence outdoors can create an impactful disturbance to both mammals and birds.¹⁴ Both studies hold human companions responsible for setting boundaries for their companion animals to curb the incidence of predation and disturbance. Such a practice can benefit animals and humans alike by maintaining a healthy and safe wildlife and urban environment.

The environmental implications of caring for companion animals demand a bird's-eye view and a microscopic lens. It entails being prudent in examining the complex connections between macro and micro practices that entangle humans and animals in the worsening state of the environment. What seems instructive in this conversation is our awareness of the existence of cultures and structures that place us at the intersection of profit-driven industries and our desire to provide the best care for our companion animals. Indeed, it necessitates a good amount of education to understand that care can be ethical and environmentally sustainable.

Ethical Issues Arising from Pet Keeping

Human-animal companionship is enveloped in the practice of pet keeping, intertwined with domestication. Pet-keeping has long been critiqued by scholars. In Karli Brittz's dissertation on dogs, it is observed that earlier scholars often conceived pet keeping as a form of domination or control exercised by humans over animals. However, it has evolved into a more nuanced definition of the complex relationship between the two parties.

¹⁴ Philip W. Bateman and Lauren N. Gilson, "Bad Dog? The Environmental Effects of Owned Dogs," *Pacific Conservation Biology* 31, no. 3 (April 10, 2025): 1-6, <https://doi.org/10.1071/pc24071>.

Britzz notes that domestication is not simply about control, but an “ambivalent” relationship.¹⁵

Biological domestication refers to the multigenerational keeping and breeding of animals that selectively enhance specific characteristics¹⁶ that may benefit humans for labor, companionship, or resources. Domestication finds its roots in early hunter-gatherer societies. Tim Ingold cites the definition of domestication from Western thought as the integration of animals as “objects into the socio-economic organization of the human group...[in which] they become a form of property which can be owned, inherited, and exchanged.”¹⁷ To contrast this Western definition, Ingold explicates that in hunter-gatherer relationships, the bond between animals and humans is based on “trust,” where hunting is understood as a cooperative act. The hunter must pay close attention to how the animal responds to the capture, as the animal carries the “power to withhold” itself if the act of hunting is coercive or against the animal’s will.¹⁸ Ingold shows that animals possess agency and are recognized as such by their human counterparts. The agency of animals is reciprocated to some degree within the relationship.

Samantha Hurn discusses that domestication alienates animals from the products of their labor, from their natural habitats and fellow species, and from freedom, as they become

¹⁵ Karli Brittz, “A Critical Reading of Companion Species on Instagram: 'Being With' and 'Becoming With' Dogs as (Non)Human Others” (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2020), 82, <https://repository.up.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/3e38c395-e658-4baa-9ecc-b457e5c44b67/content>.

¹⁶ Michelle Szydlowski, Kristine Hill, Sarah Oxley Heaney, and Jes Hooper, “Domestication and Domination: Human Terminology as a Tool for Controlling Other-than-Human Animal Bodies,” *TRACE ∴ Journal for Human-Animal Studies* 8 (April 2022): 34, <https://doi.org/10.23984/fjhas.110388>.

¹⁷ Tim Ingold, “From Trust to Domination: An Alternative History of Human–Animal Relations,” in *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Aubrey Manning and James Serpell (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.

¹⁸ Ingold, “From Trust to Domination,” 12-15.

subject to human demands for social engagement and emotional fulfillment.¹⁹ Similarly, Paul Shepard observes that domestic animals have taken on different roles that fulfill a wide range of human desires. They function as “surrogate companions, siblings, lovers, victims, workers, parents, competitors, deities, oracles, enemies, kinfolk, caretaker-watchmen, and so on.”²⁰ On the question of animals providing labor within pet keeping, Donna Haraway offers a more nuanced description of this reality. Haraway recognizes that companion animals are entwined with our intimacies and the quotidian realm. They provide humans with “surplus value labor” in the form of love, service, protection, and companionship.²¹ But as mentioned earlier, this is not to reduce them as objects of capitalization, but they are co-participants in our lives, responding with agency and reciprocal attention.²² On the other side of the pole, pet keeping, according to Yi-Fu Tuan, puts humans in a position of importance as pets or companion animals are trained to depend on them for their needs,²³ not just for food but also for human companionship.²⁴ Even earlier feminist perspectives also established that domestication is a form of oppression. For instance, Dianne Romain adopted the definition of

¹⁹ Samantha Hurn, *Humans and Other Animals: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Human-Animal Interactions*, 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 109–110.

²⁰ Paul Shepard, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996), 142.

²¹ Haraway refers to this phenomenon as “value-added,” as companion animals (especially dogs), become “commodities of a type central to the history of capitalism,” in which they function not just as co-consumers but as a resource capital for our existence—making our lives easier, happier, and more fulfilled by performing different roles. See Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 52.

²² Haraway, *When Species Meet*, 45–67.

²³ Hurn, *Humans and Other Animals*, 106–107.

²⁴ James Yeates and Julian Savulescu, “Companion Animal Ethics: A Special Area of Moral Theory and Practice?,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 20, no. 2 (January 25, 2017): 349, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-016-9778-6>.

oppression of women employed by Marilyn Frye²⁵ and extended it to animals. Romain argues:

Humans create social forces and barriers which limit cows and cats. Domestication itself limits cow and cat behavior. But cows and cats are further controlled for human purposes. Scratching cats are declawed. Cows are forced to join the milk-producing work force. Humans limit cow and cat behavior for human ends...[O]ther animals are undervalued, caused pain, and controlled for our benefit and to their detriment. Thus, other animals are oppressed.²⁶

Romain asserts that domestication alters the natural behaviors and characteristics of animals to suit human desires. On some occasions, they also become an additional resource to support the economic needs of humans.

As outlined earlier, there are scholars who strongly critique pet keeping and domestication altogether. However, as I noted at the beginning of this section, pet keeping or domestication is overwhelmed by “ambivalence,” as it vacillates between strict ethical critiques and accounts of animal mutuality and reciprocity that recenter animal agency. Over time, the understanding of pet keeping or domestication in general has shifted from frameworks of ownership and oppression to interpretations that suggest complex and situated human-animal relations. Many earlier scholars firmly held the claim that pet keeping was a practice of oppression, slavery, and control that subjects animals to human indulgence.

²⁵ Marilyn Frye defines oppression as a network of structural forms of marginalization that inhibit women’s freedom. She adopts the metaphor of a bird in a cage trapped in the crisscross of oppression—a system that is oppressive to women but oftentimes beneficial to men—structurally established, constricting women’s ability to attain freedom economically, racially, geographically, and in other dimensions. See Marilyn Frye, “Oppression,” in *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1983), 1–16.

²⁶ Dianne Romain extends the oppression framework to animals in which the latter are subjugated in ways that their natural features, their labor, and their behavior are curtailed and exploited to benefit humans. Dianne Romain, “Feminist Reflections on Humans and Other Domestic Animals,” *Between the Species an Online Journal for the Study of Philosophy and Animals* 6, no. 4 (October 1, 1990): 215, <https://doi.org/10.15368/bts.1990v6n4.13>.

However, later critical animal studies scholars repudiated the idea that human-animal companionship is not a linear bond, but a complex, intricate, and situated one.

This complexity is particularly evident in health-related procedures performed on companion animals. Some scholars denounce neutering as an act of control over animal bodies and a violation of bodily autonomy, particularly reproductive rights. Yet neutering is widely practiced to manage animal overpopulation. I personally experienced this dilemma before when I was contemplating whether I should have Pancake neutered. I questioned whether neutering would impede her biological flourishing. But I chose that she undergo the procedure to reduce the risk of reproductive health issues later in life. My decision aligns with the position of Julian Ann Smith:

Provided it is carried out humanely (under anaesthetic and coupled with the administration of post-operative analgesics), neutering can be regarded as an attempt to control humans who would otherwise breed rabbits out of ignorance or a desire to make money. There are also health benefits for female rabbits, as spaying prolongs their lives by several years and reduces susceptibility to potentially fatal uterine conditions. As a result, Smith suggests that “paternalism that instantiates control” must be distinguished from “a paternalism that attempts to make the best of already compromised situations for the animals.”²⁷

Smith maintains that neutering must be a safe and almost pain-free option for the animals involved. It is suggested that neutering reduces the risk of animals being bred for profit or placed in irresponsible care. Moreover, Smith views neutering as a decisive and proactive measure for mitigating potential health issues.

Paul Shepard critiques how pets are instrumentalized, writing that “they are civilized paraphernalia whose characteristic combination of accompaniment and accommodation is tangled in ambiguous tyranny.”²⁸ Shepard argues that human-animal relationships in pet

²⁷ Hurn, *Humans and Other Animals*, 107.

²⁸ Shepard, *The Others*, 150.

keeping are warped by domination that often appears as affectionate and loving care. This critique is relevant in contexts where companion animals are expected to adapt to human lifestyles and standards of acceptable behavior. For instance, companion animals are often conditioned to observe a set of behaviors through behavioral training. In contrast, Donna Haraway frames the training of companion animals as a form of “positive bondage,” in which both humans and animals are transformed through mutual responsiveness. Haraway does not deny the presence of discipline. Rather, she argues that animal training does not need to be authoritarian if practiced in the context of “discipline spontaneity,” where both partners learn to initiate, respond, and obey each other:

The goal is the oxymoron of disciplined spontaneity. Both dog and handler have to be able to take the initiative and to respond obediently to the other. The task is to become coherent enough in an incoherent world to engage in a joint dance of being that breeds respect and response in the flesh, in the run, on the course. And then to remember how to live like that at every scale, with all the partners.²⁹

Applying feminist animal care discussed in Chapter 2, the essence of training or reinforcement for companion animals must be in the context of attaining “the freedom to live safely in multispecies, urban and suburban environments,”³⁰ noted by Haraway. In other words, it involves adapting to a multispecies environment where specific boundaries are set to protect them from harm or untoward incidents, rather than for oppression. Reading the behavior and response of the animal, and consistently practicing empathy in training, should take precedence over the desired outcome. Entangled empathy (see Chapter 2) can be applied in the training process by assuming the position of the other and internalizing how the

²⁹ Donna J. Haraway, “The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness,” in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Scholarship Online, 2017), 154, <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816650477.003.0002>.

³⁰ Haraway, “The Companion Species,” 138.

reinforcement might impact the animal. It entails engaging the affects and attending to the power imbalance involved in training. Moreover, a good set of guiding principles for training is the list of animal capabilities that Martha Nussbaum extended to animals, and expounded by Lori Gruen (Chapter 2, n.76). In this light, animals can exercise their agency in a non-threatening space of learning. Consequently, Haraway challenges the idea that domesticated animals exist in a bond of “slavery.” Haraway argues that the concepts of property and possession are not inherently a one-way relationship of belonging where only humans hold moral claims on companion animals. Rather, Haraway suggests that even companion animals have moral claims on humans in a reciprocal relationship. As Haraway explains, “If I have a dog, my dog has a human; what that means concretely is at stake.”³¹ I see this at play in my relationship with Pancake. No matter how preoccupied I am, when she calls my attention because she needs to walk, eat, poop, or simply wants to be held, I make sure to address her needs. Human–animal companionship may be presumed to be a site of oppression or control, but if we truly mean companionship, it must always be grounded in the spirit of reciprocal care. I want to emphasize, however, that this reciprocity can always be negotiated in terms of timing and assessment of needs. One example is when Pancake wants an extra serving of her food. Sometimes she asks for it even when she is already full. In the context of negotiating reciprocity, I respond in different ways. This may not be consistent with how other human companions do it, but it is what has emerged in my daily interaction with Pancake. First, I may give in and offer her the extra serving she is asking for. Second, I may deny her the extra serving because I know that doing so would upset her stomach. Third, I may negotiate with her so that instead of getting an extra serving, she receives something else, such as

³¹ Haraway, “The Companion Species,” 145.

playtime, a brief walk, or a belly rub. In this aspect, I talk with her about it. I try to give verbal cues and read her bodily reactions to determine whether she is satisfied or not. In this example, the relationship is not always fluid, but configured according to needs. Listening, obedience, and responsiveness are exercised by both humans and companion animals in this process through back-and-forth communication. Power asymmetries exist between humans and animals due to the ways animals are culturally valued in society and humanity's flawed perception of them. Through the lens of entangled empathy, however, we encounter companion animals as beings with unique abilities and needs. We must adopt strategies to communicate with them effectively and provide opportunities for them to express their particular needs.

The manner by which companion animals are acquired is also an ethical concern.³² Hence, the endorsement of animal activists to "Adopt, Don't Shop." This approach urges people to prioritize stray animals and those that are in shelters needing homes, rather than acquiring them from breeders or pet shops. A strong motivation for this is the moral responsibility associated with adopting. One study suggests that women are more likely than men to lean into adopting or rescuing dogs and believe that the selling of dogs is "socially irresponsible."³³ This data concurs with other studies that state that more women than men are involved in animal rescue and adoption work.³⁴ Many people tend to shy away from

³² Shepard, *The Others*, 150.

³³ Courtney Bir, Nicole Widmar, and Candace Croney, "Stated Preferences for Dog Characteristics and Sources of Acquisition," *Animals* 7, no. 8 (August 5, 2017): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani7080059>.

³⁴ Women dominate all facets of canine rescue work in Michigan. Moreover, there are more women than men who agree that animals have basic rights similar to those of humans. For an in-depth gender-aggregated comparison of this case study, see Andrei Markovits and Robin Queen, "Women and the World of Dog Rescue: A Case Study of the State of Michigan," *Society and Animals* 17, no. 4 (January 1, 2009): 325–42, <https://doi.org/10.1163/106311109x12474622855147>. One of the findings of Emily Gaarder on women's predominance in animal rights activism is how women are able to resonate with animals experience of violence

adopting or rescuing stray animals due to unknown health histories and medical issues. While this may be true, one study reveals a glaring fact that people tend to prioritize dogs' overall appearance over health factors.³⁵

Pet keeping and domestication require further nuance and reflection in our world today to ensure that the welfare of our animal kin is not compromised. While there are varied ethical positions challenging these practices, this section reveals that animals possess agency, allowing them to participate in meaningful reciprocal relationships with humans. They are capable of communicating their boundaries, desires, or oppositions. However, their communicative capacities can only flourish and be reinforced in a safe and loving environment. It is necessary to acknowledge the reality that domestication has become a central part of shared human–animal life, which must be grounded by ethical norms that capture the complexity of human-animal companionship. In contexts where animals are displaced, abandoned, or vulnerable, domestication may be one of the most viable ways to protect them. Consequently, ethical pet keeping necessitates advocacy that affirms animal dignity and life without imposing forms of care that constrain or bypass their agency.

“Pets as Ambassadors” Hypothesis

The “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis was theorized by James Serpell and Elizabeth Paul, who traced the historical development of pet keeping with the salient proposition that individuals who form close bonds with pets are likely to extend empathy and moral concern

and abuse. See Emily Gaarder, “Where the Boys Aren’t: The Predominance of Women in Animal Rights Activism,” *Feminist Formations* 23, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 62–65, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ff.2011.0019>.

³⁵ Katrina E. Holland, “Acquiring a Pet Dog: A Review of Factors Affecting the Decision-Making of Prospective Dog Owners,” *Animals* 9, no. 4 (2019): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani9040124>.

to other animals, and the larger environment.³⁶ Serpell and Paul caution against arbitrary generalizations, claiming that cultural factors play a significant role in how animals are treated.³⁷ Nonetheless, empirical evidence supports their hypothesis, accounting for the influence of companion animals across a wide array of human environmental dispositions.

In a study in Australia on men and animal empathy, men who have pets or companion animals have higher levels of animal empathy compared to those who are exposed to agricultural animals and those who have limited experience with animals.³⁸ The researchers of this study recommend that men have companion animals, on the condition of having full commitment in caring for them, as a means to increase their animal empathy.³⁹ Children who experience caring for companion animals are said to develop animal empathy, but animal empathy tends to be more impactful or heightened among those who have had companion animals in adulthood.⁴⁰ A similar study supports that adults who had pets in childhood are more likely to exhibit greater moral concern for animals in adulthood, particularly companion animals and significantly appealing wild animals.⁴¹

³⁶ James A. Serpell and Elizabeth S. Paul, “Pets and the Development of Positive Attitudes to Animals,” in *Animals and Human Society: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Aubrey Manning and James A. Serpell (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 127–44, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203421444-10>.

³⁷ Serpell and Paul, “Pets and the Development,” 140.

³⁸ Georgia Anne Frampton and Jessica Lee Oliva, “Support for the ‘Pets as Ambassadors’ Hypothesis in Men: Higher Animal Empathy in Australian Pet Owners versus Non-Owners and Farmers,” *Animal Welfare* 33 (May 3, 2024): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/awf.2024.25>.

³⁹ Frampton and Oliva, “Support for the ‘Pets as Ambassadors’ Hypothesis,” 7.

⁴⁰ Beth Daly and L. L. Morton, “Empathic Differences in Adults as a Function of Childhood and Adult Pet Ownership and Pet Type,” *Anthrozoös* 22, no. 4 (October 24, 2009): 380, <https://doi.org/10.2752/089279309x12538695316383>.

⁴¹ Léa Berger-Meunier, David S. Smith, Nathalie Marec-Breton, and Nathalie Bonneton-Botté, “‘Animals Are My Friends’: Exploring the Relationship Between Animal Companionship in Childhood and Moral Concerns in Adulthood,” *Biology and Life Sciences Forum* 45, no. 1 (2025): 2, <https://doi.org/10.3390/blsf2025045002>.

People with companion animals do not only tend to develop positive relationships with animals but are also likely to exhibit more inclusivity with groups outside of their identities, greater environmental concerns beyond the animal kingdom, a higher inclination to human-animal interdependence, and more significant abstinence from meat.⁴² Caring for companion animals can also influence the dietary preference of humans by avoiding meat, either through vegetarianism or veganism, thereby extending this dietary choice to their companion animals. Even those who are not into either diet have plans of converting. While there is strong interest among human companions in feeding their companion animals plant-based diets, one significant obstacle is the lack of evidence-based research on nutritional adequacy.⁴³ This was proven by the earlier empirical study of Serpell and Paul as supporting data for the “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis. It is noted that aside from ethical food practice, early exposure to pets can influence adults’ involvement in animal welfare and environmental activism.⁴⁴ Aside from direct close contact with companion animals, having awareness of companion animals’ sentience (i.e., capacity to feel emotions and sensations) is

⁴² Catherine E. Amiot, Christophe Gagné, and Brock Bastian, “Exploring the Role of Our Contacts With Pets in Broadening Concerns for Animals, Nature, and Fellow Humans: A Representative Study,” *Scientific Reports* 13, no. 1 (October 10, 2023): 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-43680-z>.

⁴³ Sarah A. S. Dodd, Nick J. Cave, Jennifer L. Adolphe, Anna K. Shoveller, and Adronie Verbrugghe, “Plant-Based (Vegan) Diets for Pets: A Survey of Pet Owner Attitudes and Feeding Practices,” *PLoS One* 14, no. 1 (2019): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0210806>.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth S. Paul and James A. Serpell, “Childhood Pet Keeping and Humane Attitudes in Young Adulthood,” *Animal Welfare* 2, no. 4 (November 1993): 332, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0962728600016109>. The results of this study indicate that more women than men practice vegetarianism. More recent studies concur with this data, as women tend to display moral concern for ethical considerations. See John B. Nezlek and Catherine A. Forestell, “Recent Increases in Vegetarianism May Be Limited to Women: A 15-Year Study of Young Adults at an American University,” *Sex Roles* 90, no. 9 (August 14, 2024): 1234-43, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-024-01504-y>; Daniel L. Rosenfeld, “Gender Differences in Vegetarian Identity: How Men and Women Construe Meatless Dieting,” *Food Quality and Preference* 81 (November 28, 2019): 1-7, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2019.103859>.

an influencing factor to stir greater ecological concern.⁴⁵ Earlier, it was mentioned that companion animals are threats to wildlife, and yet some human companions, especially those who walk their dogs outdoors, tend to appreciate nature when they walk their dogs in areas where nature is in abundance (soundscape, fresh air, trees).⁴⁶ On the other hand, one study suggests that having companion animals is an accessible way to overcome biophobia, or an aversion to nature, as participants reported a willingness to engage with animals and organic matter. However, the study emphasizes that having companion animals does not necessarily translate into higher levels of connection to nature. The depth of humans' relationships with companion animals may also be a predictive factor influencing one's connection to nature.⁴⁷ This is confirmed by a study on the correlation between having a pet in childhood and developing a close affinity with nature, which found that "passively owning a pet" does not guarantee a stronger connection to nature in childhood or adulthood. Rather, higher levels of interaction with pets are a strong predictor of a closer connection to nature.⁴⁸ These findings affirm my reflections on sensorial and embodied relationships with companion animals discussed in Chapter 3. It was only when I took my responsibility as a human companion seriously and devoted time to learning about Pancake that I felt deeply motivated to extend

⁴⁵ Tyler P. Jacobs, Brandon T. Humphrey, and Allen R. McConnell, "Nature's Best Friend: Viewing Pets as Having Greater Emotional Experience Increases Ecological Concern," *Anthrozoös* 36, no. 4 (May 12, 2023): 634–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2023.2200647>.

⁴⁶ Jasmin Packer, Mark Kohler, Dolly Dawson, Nusrat Asad, and Anna Chur-Hansen, "Why Do People Walk Their Dog Where the Wild Things Are? A Qualitative Content Analysis from an Urban Nature Reserve," *People and Nature* 7, no. 1 (2025): 20–21, <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10758>.

⁴⁷ Alexia Barrable, "Biophobia and Pet Ownership: Can Having a Pet Mitigate Our Fear and Aversion Towards Nature?," *The International Journal of Ecopsychology (IJE)* 11, no. 1 (September 15, 2025): 13–14, <https://doi.org/10.55671/2767-1380.1135>.

⁴⁸ Alexia Barrable and Samantha Friedman, "Developing a Connection to Nature: The Role of Pet Ownership in Childhood," *People and Animals: The International Journal of Research and Practice* 7, no. 1, Article 12 (2024): 6, <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/paij/vol7/iss1/12>.

empathy to other animals. By learning about Pancake’s sentience, personality, and modes of communication, I became more attentive to other animals. I came across videos⁴⁹ of them and learned about their behavior. One piece of information led to another, which taught me many lessons about them and led to my choice to become a vegetarian.

Most studies on the “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis center on Western contexts. This raises questions about whether this phenomenon applies to other cultural settings. Hence, this thesis-project makes a significant contribution to the growing body of scholarship on how companion animals influence individuals’ environmental consciousness, particularly among those from the Global South, whose intersecting identities (i.e., Filipino single women) are often not examined in relation to animals. In my search for non-Western studies, I found several that help elucidate how companion animals shape environmental consciousness. For example, a study conducted in China among university students with companion animals in their households found that companion animals influenced their levels of animal empathy, awareness of animal welfare, and consumption of ethically sourced

⁴⁹ Informative TikTok videos about animals rectified my misconceptions about animals in general. Prior to my “conversion” or enlightenment, I had thought that only pets (i.e., domesticated animals) were capable of being trained or communicating meaningfully with humans. My limited understanding of animals was enriched by those videos. For this aspect of my learning process, the algorithm worked to my advantage as animal videos came one after another. Some of the most moving videos I watched were about farm animals, such as cows, sheep, pigs, etc. I learned that these animals also know their names. They can be as affectionate as traditional pets. They are grateful for the care of their human caretakers. They like playing and appreciating the simple joys of life. Their human caretakers also provided me with new insights into caring for Pancake. Their dedication to animal welfare and their dietary choice (veganism/vegetarianism) inspired me.

animal products.⁵⁰ In a study on children in Taiwan, children who had cared for pets developed a higher level of empathy for animals in nature.⁵¹

However, there is still a noticeable disparity in our care between companion animals and other animals. This may be attributed to the classifications that we designate to animals. Divisions of animals are widely recognized in the literature. Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka classify animals into three types from a rights-based perspective: (a) domesticated animals, or those cared for within households and dependent on humans; (b) wild animals, or those living freely in their natural habitats; and (c) liminal animals, or those that live in close proximity to humans but do not necessarily receive human care (e.g., pigeons, rats, squirrels).⁵² Ana C. Leite, Kristof Dhont, and Gordon Hodson categorize animals as pets, food (or edible) animals, and wild animals (appealing and unappealing) from a utilitarian perspective.⁵³ Carol Adams synthesizes biblical classifications of animals as follows: (a) edible animals; (b) non-edible animals; (c) animals that produce food; (d) animals kept as household companions; (e) animals that live in the household but are unwanted; (f) animals used for experimentation; (g) animals used for clothing; (h) animals considered social but

⁵⁰ Yaoming Liang et al., “Pet Ownership and Its Influence on Animal Welfare Attitudes and Consumption Intentions Among Chinese University Students,” *Animals* 14, no. 22 (November 12, 2024): 8-12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14223242>.

⁵¹ Tzuhui Angie Tseng et al., “Peer Bonds and Nature’s Embrace: Exploring the Influence of Pet Caregiving on Social Well-being and Nature Connection Among Taiwanese Children,” *Frontiers in Public Health* 12 (October 21, 2024): 6-8, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1431939>.

⁵² Will Kymlicka and Sue Donaldson, “Animals and the Frontiers of Citizenship,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 34, no. 2 (February 5, 2014): 202-203, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/gqu001>.

⁵³ Ana C. Leite, Kristof Dhont, and Gordon Hodson, “Longitudinal Effects of Human Supremacy Beliefs and Vegetarianism Threat on Moral Exclusion (Vs. Inclusion) of Animals,” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 49, no. 1 (April 21, 2018): 179-89, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2497>.

without consciousness; (i) animals that use tools; (j) animals that can be hunted; and others.⁵⁴ These divisions have implications for how companion animals orient humans in developing animal empathy and perceptions of the moral standing of animals. Based on a study on Chinese pet owners, traditional pets (i.e., dogs and cats) are perceived to have higher moral standing than non-traditional pets. Moreover, pet attachment serves as a bridge that enriches humans' recognition of the moral standing of traditional pets.⁵⁵ In general, pets or companion animals receive greater appreciation than insects and wild animals with whom humans rarely interact. Thus, it is indeed a challenge for humans with companion animals to bridge their affection for their companion animals to other animal species. This requires a holistic view of all animals as part of the same community.

As Serpell and Paul point out, views on animals are culturally determined. Thus, the “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis may manifest in various ways and degrees depending on cultural contexts. Based on the literature reviewed, the hypothesis suggests that a deep bond with companion animals can enhance animal empathy regardless of the life stage at which care occurs, as long as the relationship moves beyond surface-level ownership. It can yield many positive outcomes, including greater animal empathy, increased willingness to explore nature, reformed consumption and eating habits, and participation in environmental causes. Gender is also at play in how people with companion animals are environmentally transformed. Women tend to be more visible and active in animal and environmental activism than men, both at personal and societal levels. As one study suggests, men may

⁵⁴ Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 185.

⁵⁵ Kepeng Xu et al., “Traditional Pettism: The Influence of Pet Ownership Status, Pet Type, and Pet Properties on Pet Moral Standing,” *Acta Psychologica Sinica* 55, no. 10 (January 1, 2023): 9-10, <https://doi.org/10.3724/sp.j.1041.2023.01662>.

benefit from caring for companion animals to increase their animal empathy. Lastly, while animal empathy is developed by caring for companion animals, this empathy does not result in equal moral consideration for all types of animals. Animals that are regarded as traditional pets tend to receive higher recognition of their moral standing. This differentiated treatment of animals warrants a critical examination.

Implications of the “Pets as Ambassadors” Hypothesis for Ecological Conversion

The “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis has a lot of promise for cultivating empathy towards animals and other species, thereby supporting ecological conversion proposed in *Laudato Si’*. One particular tenet reinforced by this hypothesis is the interdependence of all beings and realities articulated through integral ecology, the conceptual umbrella of ecological conversion in *Laudato Si’*. The hypothesis implicitly illustrates how mutuality between animals and humans can facilitate a greater acknowledgment of the life and wisdom present in animals and other species. Intentional encounters with animals can stimulate curiosity, enthusiasm, and empathy in humans, leading humans to develop a motivation to embrace other life forms. Through perceptive interactions with animals, humans may experience a sense of belonging with them, which can result in treating them as part of the family. Such experiences can prompt critical reflections on the web of life. For instance, in a Facebook comment I encountered on a post about the killing of pigs, one person wrote that after sleeping beside her dog and listening to the dog’s breathing, she promised she would no longer eat a pig’s leg. She reasons that she would not do the same to her dog. In this example, associations of animal species transpire. The assumption that if a dog can feel pain, so can other animal species. In the same introspection, humans are inevitably drawn to the circle of

life of nonhuman species. It emphasizes that human life is not disconnected from the lives of other species. It is not mere coexistence but interdependence where all beings must support each other's life and well-being. If one is in pain, the other must respond.

Ecological conversion is grounded in a spiritual motivation of having “passionate concern for the protection of our world,”⁵⁶ that is “not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us.”⁵⁷ Ecological conversion offers a radical stance that shapes our mindsets, behaviors, choices, and lifestyles to support the dignity and life of other species and the whole ecological family. Therefore, it is a total transformation that seeks to liberate us from greed and selfishness by adopting “a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness”⁵⁸ by extending care to other members of our ecological world. Most of the time, it requires sacrificing our comfort and pleasure. This can only work through the spirit of generosity—giving of oneself.⁵⁹ Companionship with animals, built through meaningful relationships,

⁵⁶ Francis, *Laudato Si'* [Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home], The Holy See, June 18, 2015, sec. 216, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

⁵⁷ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 216.

⁵⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 220.

⁵⁹ For instance, while eating meat is a religious and cultural practice for some, it is also a pleasurable dietary habit in which many of us participate without realizing the suffering of the animals we consume. The meat industry deliberately conceals their suffering as animals become the absent referent, a term coined by Carol Adams to describe how animals are transformed into linguistic metaphors to obscure the horrendous pains they undergo. They are served to us as meat, but we fail to acknowledge that we consume real animals—flesh and blood—who once lived with us and were overwhelmed by fear as they faced their death. This systemic obscuring of animals and their suffering buries the reality that the pleasure of the palate is satiated at the expense of animals. Adams writes, “The absent referent permits us to forget about the animal as an independent entity; it also enables us to resist efforts to make animals present.” See Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory (20th Anniversary Edition)* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 66.

In the spirit of generosity toward ecological conversion, we are called to overcome the pitfalls of pleasure so that we may build authentic relationships with animals. The Catholic Lenten practice of abstaining from meat can be reframed—from an act of penance or rejection of pleasure to an expression of care and love for animals. This reframing integrates ecological conversion as a disposition that fosters solidarity with animals

corresponds to the vision of ecological conversion. It inspires us to become aware of the realities and difficulties of the times, while nurturing the passion to mend relationships that have been severed by disharmony.

The empirical data supporting the “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis, in resonance with ecological conversion, suggests that deep bonds with animals may be best illustrated by Franciscan animal spirituality. Similarly, Franciscan animal spirituality is grounded in embodied and sensorial relationships that move beyond pet-keeping and master-pet dynamics. And these relationships must motivate human companions to look beyond their immediate fellowship with their companion animals by developing the same empathy for other animals. Lori Gruen supports the possibility of fellowship with animals who are more distant or different from the animals we are usually exposed to. Drawn from her friendship with Emma, a chimpanzee, Gruen believes that this is unlocked by entangled empathy (see Chapter 2) with the animals in proximity to us:

Once one’s perception is altered, other relations move to the foreground. Entangled empathy can occur with those who are more distant. We are in relationships of all kinds with many, many animals and we may never have the opportunity to meet them or look them into their eyes. But once we are attuned to some of them, as I became attuned to chimpanzees, we can begin to understand our relationships with and responsibilities to many others differently.⁶⁰

Building on this, our relationship with animals can begin with one deep, embodied friendship with a specific animal. It should begin somewhere and be supported in our journey. The big question, then, is how this gap might be addressed from a ministerial and pastoral

and embodies resistance to animal suffering. Ultimately, it unites us with the suffering of Christ, who did not come only for humans but for all of creation.

⁶⁰ Lori Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals* (Lantern Books, 2015), 79.

perspective. I recognize the interiorization of our connections with animals can be supported by the Church through the following efforts:

1. Education initiatives about animals and the environment

The Church has a powerful prophetic voice of Christ⁶¹ that can contribute to a greater understanding of animals. Pastoral-level initiatives of disseminating information about animals and the environment can increase people's positive perceptions of animals. Through postings in parish bulletins, featured articles in parish magazines, and infographics on social media, the core message of protecting animals can gain traction with people. Parish catechesis or religious education for youth is also an appropriate avenue to teach young people about animals. More often than not, when *Laudato Si'* is spoken about, it hardly includes cultivating meaningful relationships with animals. Thus, education on animal welfare and dignity needs to be strengthened through sharing evocative information that is culturally and ethically respectful.⁶²

2. A renewed homiletics that integrates appreciation and care for animals

Animals have not been fully encapsulated in biblical studies due to Western anthropocentric biases of philosophies and theologies.⁶³ Parish homilies or sermons

⁶¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church], November 21, 1964, sec. 12, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁶² Relationships between humans and animals vary across cultures. For instance, some Indigenous peoples continue to consume animals in ritual ceremonies as part of their spiritual and cultural traditions. While this needs to be examined, non-combative and culturally respectful approaches should be employed. Integral ecology may serve as a framework that recognizes culturally grounded and life-affirming approaches to ecological conversion by understanding the complex interactions among social, cultural, economic, and political aspects of upholding our role as co-creators of the ecological family. In this manner, cultural prejudices may be examined toward a more pronounced ecological conversion that respects diverse forms of conviviality with nature.

⁶³ Arthur Walker-Jones and Suzanna R. Millar, "Introduction: Difference, Identity, Indistinction," in *Ask the Animals: Developing a Biblical Animal Hermeneutic* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2024), 2-5.

are valuable avenues for facilitating dialogue about animals. Scripture is rich in imagery and narratives that feature animals that can “provide forgotten insights into animal lives.”⁶⁴ Pastors, priests, or church leaders are well-positioned to invite people to reflect on their relationships with animals. The *Preaching with the Sciences*⁶⁵ project of Catholic Theological Union is one example of how the art of homiletics is employed to teach us about animals and how their lives impact ours. Animal hermeneutics can be a good resource for developing a culturally and historically accurate understanding of animals in the Bible.⁶⁶ God’s Word through homilies and sermons can assist people who have lost an animal, which may necessitate spiritual guidance and accompaniment. Deliberately including animals in the purview of preaching can console those who are afflicted by the death of their departed animals.

3. Reinforced presence of animals within the life of the Church

As I mentioned in the previous chapters, many parishes around the world have incorporated animals into the life of the Church through liturgical and ministerial activities. While it is now done across churches, it is not yet fully embraced by all churches and religious organizations. Moreover, caring for animals is not highlighted as a ministry that develops ecological conversion. Greater visibility of animals on

⁶⁴ Walker-Jones and Millar, “Introduction: Difference, Identity, Indistinction,” 5.

⁶⁵ *Preaching with the Sciences* is a repository of homily outlines that utilize various allied sciences to preach the Word of God. One of the sciences featured by the project is animal studies, through which scientific findings on animals are creatively integrated in the exposition of religious meanings. See “Preaching with the Sciences,” Catholic Theological Union, accessed February 22, 2026, <https://ctu.edu/preaching-with-the-sciences/>.

⁶⁶ Some sources on animal hermeneutics that I have found were: for a collection of articles on biblical interpretations of animals, see Arthur Walker-Jones and Suzanna R. Millar, eds., *Ask the Animals: Developing a Biblical Animal Hermeneutic* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2024); for a more personal and attentive placement of animals within the Gospel, see Andrew Linzey, *Animal Gospel* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1999); for interpretations of animals in the Hebrew Bible, see Ken Stone, *Reading the Hebrew Bible With Animal Studies* (Stanford University Press, 2017).

parish and church premises establishes a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for all members of the Church. It insinuates that bonds with animals are fundamental loci for developing one's relationship with God and the environment. Aside from the commonly practiced blessing of animals on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, other liturgical services for animals may be dispensed. For instance, in the book *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care*⁶⁷ by Andrew Linzey, other liturgical rites that can be extended to animals, such as liturgies for animal companionship, burial, animal welfare, healing, and others. These can profoundly sustain both humans and animals involved. Having animals become central members of the Church communicates that animals are included in God's vision of love and community, suggesting that they must be treated as our neighbors. Moreover, such efforts can attract more people to return to church or become more active members.

I am aware that parishes and other religious communities are often overwhelmed by the work in the vineyard and may lack the human resources to undertake additional responsibilities. The proposed forms of care outlined above are pastoral interventions that can be integrated into existing programs and ministries. Hence, it is important that these are streamlined with current parish structures. Some parishes, however, may have greater resources that would allow them to expand this work by instituting programs for animal adoption or offering direct spiritual accompaniment to human companions. The goal is to adapt these interventions according to each parish's capacities and to discern which initiatives are most viable.

⁶⁷ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015).

Conclusion

This chapter addresses one of the arguments of this thesis-project: that companion animals can stimulate environmental consciousness. Companionship with animals can stimulate empathy for other species and create ripple effects on our responsibility toward the whole environment, as demonstrated by the “pets as ambassadors” hypothesis. However, simply having companion animals does not guarantee motivations to care for the environment, as shown by studies. It only occurs when humans forge embodied, attentive, and authentic relationships with animals—qualities of fellowship with animals present in Franciscan animal spirituality—that can lead to ecological conversion. It is important to note that companionship with animals is nuanced by different environmental and ethical positions. Human-animal companionship must be understood within a framework that acknowledges the environmental and ethical issues surrounding this relationship. Therefore, while this companionship can be a great pathway to grow in empathy for animals, it should be practiced with a judicious moral stance that challenges power asymmetries and exercises care that minimizes environmental impacts.

The Church can assist in this area by initiating liturgical, educational, and homiletic initiatives for the care of animals, mediated through their human companions. Caring for animals is a nurturing commitment that requires practices grounded in integral ecology, which dispels capitalist, utilitarian, and binary notions of animals toward ethical and sustainable human-animal companionship.

The next chapter, which is the survey of the positionality of Filipino single women and their relationship with animals through the lens of postcolonial ecofeminism, will reveal how

the Philippine Church needs to embrace all animals and recognize that empathy for humans is intimately linked to empathy for animals.

Chapter 5

The Enmeshment of Filipino Single Women and Companion Animals in Marginalization

*When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary.*¹—Frantz Fanon

Introduction

In Chapter 2, I stated that women and animals are entangled in their experience of linguistic marginalization. Filipino single women and companion animals are significantly intertwined in the exploration of this thesis-project. Examining their ministry of care demands a thorough understanding of their situated lived experiences. Their binding is never accidental, but something that emerged from existing socio-cultural and political realities in the Philippines. Ecological conversion, as a ministry framework, addresses the disintegration of our relationships with the whole of creation. This includes the failure of governing structures that entrench power and control through patriarchal, colonial, and imperial forms of domination. Therefore, the intersecting marginalization of Filipino single women and companion animals is not devoid of their ministry praxis but is an informative and corollary element within it.

In this chapter, I will use postcolonial ecofeminism to scrutinize the intersecting marginalization of single women and companion animals in the Philippines, rooted in colonial and imperial domination, and maintained by patriarchy. Agnes Brazal underscores

¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 42.

the importance of postcolonial ecofeminism in examining the interlocking exploitation of women and nature, which aims to decolonize:

Postcolonial ecofeminism interrogates how colonial/neocolonial/metropolitan interests are represented in concepts of women and nature with the ultimate aim of “decolonization” in mind... In a postcolonial ecofeminist perspective, postcolonial criticism and ecofeminism combine to show that colonialism, neocolonialism, classism, caste-ism, racism, and other forms of domination are interlinked with both the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. All of these embed a logic of domination.²

Postcolonial ecofeminism is critical of how colonial logics rooted in systems of patriarchy affect women and nature. It analyzes how women and their relationship with nature are shaped by these colonial structures. In the context of single women and companion animals, these systems of domination may appear imperceptible, at times very quiet. And yet, they create a milieu for both that constitutes layers of subjugation, deprivation, or even constant pressures—a dispossession. Dada Docot calls this reality “ambient violence,” where the former colony deals with the “perpetual postcolonial messiness”³ left by the colonizers. But this violence is “tolerated in their ordinariness.”⁴ Single women are not overtly coerced but they experience persistent stigmatization rooted in patriarchy and colonial ideals as society looks at their kinship with their companion animals through humor, trivialization of choice, and overlooking their honorable work for nature. Moreover, their subjugation is also systemically placed within their differentiated access to welfare services, invisible care work, and social stigmatization. This chapter intends to unwrap this reality that has been normalized and treated as part of the everyday through the lens of postcolonial ecofeminism.

² Agnes M. Brazal, "Ethics of Care in Laudato Si': A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (May 2021): 221, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000614>.

³ Dada Docot, *Town of Dollars: Ambient Violence and Everyday Dispossession in the Philippines* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2026), 9.

⁴ Docot, *Town of Dollars*, 10.

In relation to the dynamic relationship between women and nature, I want to clarify that women's relationship with nature is not inherent or biological. However, the construction of women's role within the reproductive sphere has entwined women with nature. This means that when nature is destroyed, women suffer the consequences more than men. Veering away from this essentialist portrayal of women's connection with nature, I argue, should not make us overlook that many women around the world choose to attend to and care for nature out of empathy and solidarity. This is seen in how single women opt to care for rescue animals as a personal commitment.

In analyzing the overlapping marginalization of single women and companion animals, I will do the following:

First, I will examine the current situation of single women by identifying the structures that subjugate them. I will do this by outlining cultural norms and expectations attached to single women, nuanced by the "deficit narratives." These narratives reflect assumptions of society that single women live unfulfilling lives because they do not have a family and are not married. Then, I will investigate the oppression of women during the Spanish and American occupation that sheds light on Philippine society's deficit narratives about single women.

Second, I will inquire into the condition of companion animals by outlining three cases that illustrate intertwined issues implicating animals. In these cases, I will explore how the home, the community, and the church can be loci for animal cruelty—enthused by patriarchy, ecclesiastical power, and imperial structures. Then, I will locate animals in the spiritual and ecological materiality of the pre-colonial Philippines. I will contrast this with the colonial regimes that controlled the thriving of animals and separated them from humans.

Third, I will analyze all the insights with postcolonial feminism, critiquing the colonial and imperialist bodies that exploit both single women and companion animals. Alongside this is a proposal to retrieve the pre-colonial wealth of wisdom and beauty that would emancipate both single women and companion animals and benefit the whole cosmos.

This chapter will set the stage for the subsequent chapter, containing the data from phenomenological interviews with participating Filipino single women. These data discuss their experience of ecological conversion— being spiritually and environmentally enriched by their companion animals, as they engage in reciprocal bonds with them.

Filipino Single Women

The Philippines has the highest percentage of single individuals in Southeast Asia, with the rate of 49% as of 2021, followed by Brunei and Malaysia.⁵ It is estimated that 4 out of 10 Filipinos are single, according to the 2020 data of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).⁶ Within the social identity of singlehood among women in the Philippines, there are several categories: unmarried, annulled, separated, widowed, or in cohabitation. In this thesis-project, I intentionally focus on unmarried single women who do not have children. Bella DePaulo suggests that single people in this group encounter marginalization that is usually subtle, quiet, and even unnoticeable. This reality is due to the strong leaning of

⁵ Akhyari Hananto, “Love Is in the Air (Or Not): Philippines Tops Southeast Asia’s Single Individuals,” *SEASIA*, June 5, 2024, <https://seasia.co/2024/06/05/love-is-in-the-air-or-not-philippines-tops-southeast-asias-single-individuals>.

⁶ Out of the population of 86.33 million in the Philippines, 34.26 million (39.7%) of the population were never married. 15.72 million of the 34.26 million are women. See Philippine Statistics Authority, “Four Out of Ten Persons Were Never Married (2020 Census of Population and Housing),” February 16, 2023, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/four-out-ten-persons-were-never-married-2020-census-population-and-housing>.

society on the ideology of marriage and family.⁷ Thus, some single people might not even realize that they experience stigmatization⁸ as systems of exclusion prioritize family-oriented values. But their experience of marginalization is enough to make them feel *Othered*. Single people, particularly single women, endure “negative stereotyping, interpersonal rejection, economic disadvantage, and discrimination” called *singlism*.⁹ Singlism, as a phenomenon, is shrouded in casual commentaries from relatives and friends about not having plans to get married; in social protection only accessed by married people; in welfare services that privilege only households with children; and in legal rights exclusive to married people, such as being considered next of kin of a significant other or friend. The hyper fixation on the ideology of marriage and family inexorably excludes single people.¹⁰ Furthermore, since the ideology of marriage and family has been endorsed by religion and employed as a political banner,¹¹ it is accepted as the norm rather than a choice.

The Philippines, with approximately 76 million Catholics, is the largest Catholic nation in Asia.¹² Being predominantly Catholic, Christian notions of marriage and family

⁷ Bella M. DePaulo and Wendy L. Morris, “Singles in Society and in Science,” *Psychological Inquiry* 16, no. 2-3 (2005): 65, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2005.9682918>. DePaulo and Morris define the “ideology of marriage and family” as a cultural construction of marriage as the highest and most valuable form of commitment that inevitably builds unequal and discriminatory systems for single people.

⁸ DePaulo and Morris, “Singles in Society and in Science,” 65.

⁹ DePaulo and Morris, “Singles in Society and in Science,” 60.

¹⁰ DePaulo and Morris, “Singles in Society and in Science,” 60.

¹¹ DePaulo and Morris, “Singles in Society and in Science,” 65. In Philippine politics, government leaders deliberately exploit society’s inclination to the ideology of marriage and family. Former President Ferdinand Marcos Sr., the architect of martial law in the Philippines, was depicted as the father of the nation, while his wife Imelda Marcos introduced herself as the mother. Former President Rodrigo Duterte, precursor of the war on drugs, also profited from his image as the father of the country, making him popularly known as “Tatay Digong” despite his authoritarian, blasphemous, and misogynistic persona. Both leaders adopted an authoritarian image of a father to implement discipline and order to maintain power.

¹² Michael Lipka, “5 facts about Catholicism in the Philippines,” Pew Research Center, January 9, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/01/09/5-facts-about-catholicism-in-the-philippines/>.

have shaped the value that people attach to marriage and family. Marriage is a sacred blessing of union for Filipinos.¹³ Besides its sanctity, marriage is ingrained in women as a source of economic security, social ties, and identity, which women are expected to maintain at all costs.¹⁴ Marriage is an anticipated transition in the life of single women. Women are being prepared for marriage early on to become dutiful wives.¹⁵ The home acts as a training ground for learning how to serve their future husband and family. Being a faithful and dutiful wife is considered the “highest feminine achievement.”¹⁶ It is as if a woman’s achievements were invalid if she did not end up getting married. While marriage is a good vocation, it is not everyone’s calling.

Age is an important intersectional identity in understanding the lived experiences of single women, especially their struggles against societal marginalization.¹⁷ The ages in this study range from 26 to 60 years old. This choice marks two important life transitions for Filipino women. In 2023, 28 is the median age for women to get married.¹⁸ At 26, single

¹³ Lindy Williams and Michael Philip Guest, “Attitudes Toward Marriage Among the Urban Middle-Class in Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines,” *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 36, no. 2 (2005): 174, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcfs.36.2.163>.

¹⁴ Eleanor R. Dionisio, “Sex and Gender,” in *Sex and Gender in Philippine Society: A Discussion of Issues on the Relations Between Women and Men*, ed. by Elizabeth U. Eviota (National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, 1994), 16-18.

¹⁵ Dionisio, “Sex and Gender,” 16.

¹⁶ Dionisio, “Sex and Gender,” 8.

¹⁷ Single women are subjected to a “triple disenfranchisement” based on age, gender, and single status. See Kinneret Lahad and Haim Hazan, “The Terror of the Single Old Maid: On the Insolubility of a Cultural Category,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 47 (September 19, 2014): 135, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2014.08.001>.

¹⁸ Statista Research Department, “Median Age of Registered Marriages Philippines 2019-2023, by Gender,” Statista, November 29, 2025, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1283875/philippines-median-age-of-registered-marriages-by-gender/?srsltid=AfmBOoonjN9kb75x7chof-oL_Vw4Bj1IK0vET3wGSglGhO7sN2U_4MpK.

women are expected to seriously consider marriage. Social pressures intensify if one is still undecided or does not have any plans of getting married. At 60, women traditionally enter retirement age. While 65 is the standard retirement age, 60 is when formal employment typically ends. Within this period, single women may have diverse obligations, both personal and professional, as well as familial and societal, that they are expected to fulfill. Major decisions are often made during this period, influenced by societal norms and expectations.

Scholarship in singlehood has primarily focused on Western-educated single individuals who come from more progressive countries.¹⁹ Although there are shared similarities among single women across the globe, single women in the Philippines experience a unique context that may not apply to other single women in another part of the world. Indeed, exploring one facet of the lives of single women in the Philippines, particularly their bond with companion animals, can provide insights into human-animal companionship. This could shed light on ministry work and reciprocal relationships between humans and animals.

Deficit Narratives about Single Women

Bella DePaulo argues that the lived experiences of single people are seen by scholars and society through “deficit narratives.” These narratives imply that singlehood is “abnormal, unnatural, and inferior” in comparison to the social norm of being coupled or married.²⁰ Married people are assumed to be superior to single people as marriage is deemed the ideal

¹⁹ Bella DePaulo, “Lessons I’ve Learned From Decades of Studying Singlehood,” *Journal of Gender Studies*, January 13, 2026, 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2025.2611974>.

²⁰ Bella DePaulo, “Single and Flourishing: Transcending the Deficit Narratives of Single Life,” *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 15, no. 3 (2023): 391, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12525>.

familial structure, particularly in contexts when children are involved.²¹ Single women are often referred to as *matandang dalaga* (old maiden), *hindi swerte sa pagibig* (not lucky at love), or *napagiwanan ng panahon* (left behind). All these pejorative descriptors signify that singlehood is an unfortunate path. There is an assumption that if a woman fails to marry, there must be something wrong with her, be it her physical appearance, personality, or attitude. If a single woman has a successful career and is conventionally attractive, people think that she is *sobrang pihikan* (with high standards). Even having high standards for men is disapproved, especially when the single woman is past society's concept of ideal marrying age. It reinforces the belief that women should be desirable and not be picky to bag a potential husband. Yet, single men are not subjected to these stereotypes and expectations as they are perceived to choose singlehood.²² The deficit narratives around single women primarily paint a life in isolation and misery, and are self-centered as they miss out on motherhood.

Alone, Lonely, and Miserable

The ideology of marriage and family has been used as a measure of happiness. Thus, not being in a marital commitment must make one unhappy, lonely, and unsatisfied.²³ Single women's happiness is significantly shaped by singlism. Due to pervasive societal criticisms, single women may choose conformity over authenticity. One of the participants in a study on

²¹ DePaulo, "Single and Flourishing," 391.

²² Elyakim Kislev, "Being Single in the 21st Century: Reasons and Consequences," in *Modern Relationships: Romance, Friendship, and Family in the 21st Century*, ed. Mahzad Hojjat and Anne Moyer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2024), 59, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197655504.003.0004>.

²³ DePaulo and Morris, "Singles in Society and in Science," 63.

middle-aged single women in the Philippines has internalized the deficit narratives. She believes that her life would only be as purposeful if it were devoted to taking care of nephews, which originates from the ideology of marriage and family.²⁴ Even if single women are actually fulfilled, they may still question their purpose based on what society considers acceptable. Personal dreams and aspirations may be halted by the people around them if they are not aligned with the societal prototype of what a woman should be doing.²⁵ In situations when single people are happy, society thinks that their happiness is not genuine or just overcompensation.²⁶ When a single woman prioritizes herself by advancing in education, travelling, or volunteering, it may be interpreted as a façade to hide her loneliness or to look happy. The negative voice of society can impact the happiness of single women. To stress that singlehood is not inherently a lonely and miserable life does not deny that married life can be fulfilling as much as it can be unsatisfying. Studies have shown that married couples benefit from and experience satisfaction in their marriage, with distinct changes occurring across the different stages of married life.²⁷

²⁴ Samantha Erika N. Mendez, "Happy Spinsters? Singlehood as Experienced by Single Middle-Aged Women in the Philippines," *Personal Relationships* 32, no. 3 (August 19, 2025): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.70022>.

²⁵ Samantha Erika N. Mendez and Michelle G. Ong, "Experiencing Meaning in Life as Thirty-Something Single Filipinas through Caring for Self and for Others," *Review* 66, no. 1 (2022): 85, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Samantha-Erika-Mendez-2/publication/378803297_Experiencing_Meaning_in_Life_as_Thirty-Something_Single_Filipinas_through_Caring_for_Self_and_for_Others/links/66d7e9adf84dd1716c93fd92/Experiencing-Meaning-in-Life-as-Thirty-Something-Single-Filipinas-through-Caring-for-Self-and-for-Others.pdf.

²⁶ DePaulo and Morris, "Singles in Society and in Science," 63.

²⁷ Single individuals and married couples from Japan and America were compared to identify their level of satisfaction. The results show married couples from both countries have better physical health and life satisfaction. See Lester Sim and Robin Edelstein, "Cross-Cultural Differences in the Links Between Familial Support and Strain in Married and Single Adults' Well-Being," *Personal Relationships* 32, no. 3 (September 15, 2025): 1-10, <https://doi.org/10.1111/per.70027>. Married couples, in comparison to cohabitators, are likely to have lower levels of depression. See Kristen Marcussen, "Explaining Differences in Mental Health Between Married and Cohabiting Individuals," *Social Psychology Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (2005): 252, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019027250506800304>. As married couples anticipate marriage, their satisfaction tends

Single women are portrayed in children's stories and movies as grumpy, short-tempered, or lonely, living in a dark house and isolating herself from the community. Often, they are personified with qualities associated with a lack of warmth and care, especially those who are older in age.²⁸ The negative perceptions of single women are connected to the deficit narrative of “not having anyone,” and thus, they must be lonely and lacking in nurturing instincts.²⁹ Single women are misconstrued to be lonely despite having social networks of important people in their lives. Bella DePaulo argues that due to couple-centered views on single women, even their social relations are made invisible. Single women have meaningful connections to their family, friends, and co-workers.³⁰ Filipino single women devote themselves to caring for others—family, friends, and communities—which is a source of meaning in their lives.³¹ I extend this to their pets or companion animals. Companion animals are presumed to be a placeholder for men³² and children, instead of being seen as actual companions and family. This is quite disturbing as it suggests that once a woman gets married and raises a family, she will then lose interest in her companion animals. While

to be high, and it tends to decrease years after the marriage. See Alois Stutzer and Bruno S. Frey, “Does Marriage Make People Happy, or Do Happy People Get Married?,” *The Journal of Socio-Economics* 35, no. 2 (February 4, 2006): 336-337, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socec.2005.11.043>.

²⁸ Janine Hertel, Astrid Schütz, Bella M. DePaulo, Wendy L. Morris, and Tanja S. Stucke, “She’s Single, so What? How Are Singles Perceived Compared With People Who Are Married? Sie Ist Single ..., Na Und? Wie Werden Singles Im Vergleich Zu Verheirateten Personen Wahrgenommen?,” *Journal of Family Research* 19 (2) (September 1, 2007): 148-149, <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-301>.

²⁹ Hertel, Schütz, DePaulo, Morris, and Stucke, “She’s Single, so What?,” 153.

³⁰ DePaulo, “Lessons I’ve Learned From Decades of Studying Singlehood,” 3-4.

³¹ Mendez and Ong, “Experiencing Meaning in Life as Thirty-Something Single Filipinas,” 87.

³² Kinneret Lahad and Haim Hazan, “The Terror of the Single Old Maid,” 130.

motherhood can be taxing and alter a woman's relationship with companion animals, it is unfair to claim that companion animals are there just to fill a gaping hole.

Missing out on Motherhood

The answer of Sushmita Sen, Ms. Universe 1994, has become a hallmark reference for womanhood among Filipinos; she says, "Just being a woman is a gift of God that all of us must appreciate. The origin of a child is a mother, who is a woman...She shows a man what caring, sharing, and loving is all about. That's the essence of being a woman."³³ Her message rings a familiar tone as it resonates with Philippine society's view of women, wifehood, and motherhood. Wifehood is closely linked with motherhood in Filipino culture, where giving birth equates with femininity. Consequently, marriage and motherhood are seen as inseparable in the eyes of society.³⁴ Being childfree in the context of marriage or being a single mother/solo parent holds weight against the institution of Christian marriage and family. As a result, a single mother or solo parent becomes a subject for pity and prejudice, often referred to as *disgraciada* (shameful, disgraceful, pitiful). In a Catholic nation like the Philippines, having both parents united by marriage is considered the ideal environment for children. Children born out of wedlock are stigmatized for being illegitimate and are commonly believed to have no claim on the father's surname and support³⁵ even though the law says otherwise.³⁶ Furthermore, single women who choose to be childfree are thought to

³³ Miss Universe, "Miss Universe 1994 - Sushmita Sen (INDIA)," recorded May 21, 1994, posted by skiace, YouTube video, 4:15–4:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PDqsS6VCek>.

³⁴ Mendez, "Happy Spinsters? Singlehood as Experienced by Single Middle-Aged Women," 3.

³⁵ Williams and Guest, "Attitudes Toward Marriage," 174.

³⁶ Philippines, Family Code of the Philippines, Executive Order No. 209 (July 6, 1987), Art. 175, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1987/07/06/executive-order-no-209-s-1987/>. The article states that:

be missing out on motherhood. Motherhood is depicted as the pinnacle of womanhood and an opportunity to give life. Despite this, many single women in the Philippines extend care to other mothers in the family and nurture children not their own. However, their care work remains invisible.

The agency and sufficiency of single women are also called into question in the context of motherhood. Single women are often the target of curiosity from elderly women during family reunions, with questions like, “Who will take care of you when you get older?” accompanied by a disclaimer, “I’m just concerned.” This is a never-ending topic of discussion, often expressed as a sign of concern. This can be unpacked into several segments of reality. First, single women are assumed to be incapable of caring for themselves in their twilight years. It overlooks the fact that many single women have a support system that they can lean on. Moreover, it denies single women their capacity to prepare for their old age. Second, children are expected to provide care to their aging parents to the point of sacrificing their own freedom and happiness. Bearing children presupposes having someone to support you in old age. Children are treated as a “retirement plan” for financial, physical, and emotional needs. Third, marriage and family are seen as a social security net more for the protection of the parents than a life-giving choice that benefits the children.

Motherhood is connoted as a beautiful and miraculous moment in a woman’s life. However, it should not be imposed on others and should not be considered as a safety net for the parents’ future. Rather, it must be discerned properly and chosen freely, with a

“Illegitimate children shall use the surname and shall be under the parental authority of their mother, and shall be entitled to support in conformity with this Code. The legitime of each illegitimate child shall consist of one-half of the legitime of a legitimate child. Except for this modification, all other provisions in the Civil Code governing successional rights shall remain in force.”

commitment to provide life and care until it is needed by the child. No single woman misses out on motherhood if her priorities are not aligned with it, and if her current state is not suitable for bringing life into the world. Single women are not mere bodies designed to procreate just to fulfill a social expectation, but persons who have agency to decide how they wish to extend life and care to humanity and to the world according to their calling.

Realities of Single Women Beyond Myths

Deficit narratives about singlehood characterize Filipino single women as flawed, inadequate, and incomplete. They are mistakenly thought to live only for themselves because they do not have a spouse or children. Such narratives do not account for their real lived experiences. While Bella DePaulo intentionally redresses the deficit narratives about single women, it does not mean that we should not acknowledge the structures that systematically marginalize them.³⁷ In this section, I will discuss systems in the form of laws, norms, policies, and practices of inequality that Filipino single women experience. Some of these are subtle and not noticeable, but when they combine, they can significantly create barriers for single women.

Disenfranchisement

Single people across the globe are bound to unequal systems that privilege married people in terms of laws, policies, and norms.³⁸ In the Philippines, employment policies do not provide leave to take care of sick parents or family members under one's care that are

³⁷ DePaulo, "Lessons I've Learned From Decades of Studying Singlehood," 11.

³⁸ DePaulo, "Lessons I've Learned From Decades of Studying Singlehood," 5.

comparable to maternity or paternity leave. However, there is a gynecology leave that all women, regardless of civil status, can take for gynecological procedures, equivalent to up to two months of paid leave.³⁹ Moreover, education benefits for children of married couples do not translate into similar benefits for single women who may support the education of younger relatives. Health coverage also disenfranchises single women, as dependents are not equally covered across different employment-based schemes. Under PhilHealth, a government-run health insurance program, single women may have their parents (if aged 60 or older and not otherwise members, or if permanently disabled), legally adopted children, or foster children covered without additional premium contributions.⁴⁰ Having parents qualify only at age 60 or under conditions of disability limits opportunities for them to access preventative care earlier in life. Employers that provide health coverage often extend benefits to the employee's spouse and children, sometimes automatically or with a company subsidy. If single people wish for their parents to be covered, they typically have to enroll them separately and pay additional costs.

In the workplace, single people draw fulfillment and meaning from their work.⁴¹ Filipino single career women, ages 40 and above, reported satisfaction at work and are motivated to work to give back to loved ones.⁴² Generally, compared to married people,

³⁹ Philippine Commission on Women, *Republic Act No. 9710: Magna Carta of Women: Implementing Rules and Regulations*, sec.18 (San Miguel, Manila: Office of the President, 2010).

⁴⁰ PhilHealth, "Qualified Dependents for Formal Economy," accessed March 29, 2026, <https://www.philhealth.gov.ph/members/formal/dependent.php>.

⁴¹ Elyakim Kislev, "Singles in the Workplace," in *Singular Selves: An Introduction to Singles Studies*, ed. Ketaki Chowkhani and Craig Wynne (London: Routledge, 2023), 138-50, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003300793-13>.

⁴² Michelle N. Fajardo, "Life Experiences of Single Career Women: Their Views, Challenges, and Coping," *The Summit* (2014): 7, <https://rpo.ua.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/1-Michelle-Fajardo-Summit-2014-for-printing-March-2020.pdf>.

single people are more prone to work burnout. For instance, in a study on healthcare professionals, single healthcare professionals are more susceptible to burnout in comparison to their married counterparts.⁴³ Besides their self-imposed grit and drive, added pressures come from discriminatory work policies due to the assumption that single people do not have the same responsibilities at home as their married counterparts. Thus, they are expected to work longer hours, anticipate more tasks, and cover for married employees.⁴⁴

As Filipino single women are likely to live with companion animals that provide them with emotional support,⁴⁵ the absence of laws and employment provisions related to animal care also impacts them. In the United States (New York)⁴⁶ and Spain,⁴⁷ companion animals are recognized as immediate family members, moving beyond the concept of property. In some countries, employers provide paid leave for the bereavement of their companion animals. In Spain, custody and welfare of companion animals are now part of the

⁴³ Jing Wang et al., “Burnout Syndrome in Healthcare Professionals Who Care for Patients With Prolonged Disorders of Consciousness: A Cross-sectional Survey,” *BMC Health Services Research* 20, no. 1 (September 7, 2020): 5-8, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-020-05694-5>.

⁴⁴ Xiaolin Shi and Jieyu Shi, “Who Cares About Single Childless Employees in the Hotel Industry? Creating a Workplace Culture Beyond Family-friendly,” *Tourism Management* 90 (December 25, 2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104477>.

⁴⁵ Fajardo, “Life Experiences of Single Career Women,” 16.

⁴⁶ In June 2025, pets started to be considered as “immediate family” in New York based on the landmark ruling by a Brooklyn Supreme Court judge in *DeBlase v. Hill*, which departed from the traditional property model for pets. See *DeBlase v. Hill*, 2025 N.Y. Slip Op. 25156 (Supreme Court, Kings County, New York, June 17, 2025), <https://www.nonhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Deblase-v-Hill-decision.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Edward Clark, “Spain Just Passed a Law Saying Pets Are Family, Not Property,” *AOL*, November 17, 2025, https://www.aol.com/articles/spain-just-passed-law-saying-193851863.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xILmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAABIx5b_K1ycpwzlf5dw1lx9wHIPoThLwPEyNuERYi9ppTKFsez3fypUj_paNOQqiovHWOSIc2vydTylPhERl2xkG1KC41_sBU4YYSB0Yr70ii0ndMoshRL8qWxWfPT90XVxsI5BMF23fZ_2fkm4s-Vxxw_9D3i0N1OGFbe7bfSH7.

discussion in divorce proceedings as they are now considered sentient beings.⁴⁸ Others include pet insurance as part of their employee benefits. Legal frameworks and employment-granted benefits like this are important measures that ensure companion animals receive the care they deserve. For single women who single-handedly provide care for their companion animals, government-mandated laws dedicated to companion animals can augment their ability to be present with their companion animals in times of sickness or death. It is timely to recommend that Philippine law formally recognize companion animals as family members and provide legal protections to support their care and welfare, especially during critical situations. For instance, providing legal underpinnings for emotional support animals (ESAs) can affect the housing rights of single women.

Caught up in the Sandwich Generation and Breadwinner Roles

At an early age, Filipino women are socialized to perform duties for the family,⁴⁹ which is not expected of men. Single daughters become the caregivers of their parents and the ones expected to take full custody of them in their old age. Aside from their parents, children of their siblings or relatives who work overseas fall into their care.⁵⁰ Sometimes, caring for the children of members of the family is self-initiated so that they may experience some form of motherhood, believed to be an extension of their womanhood.⁵¹ This

⁴⁸ Clark, "Spain Just Passed a Law Saying Pets Are Family, Not Property."

⁴⁹ Mendez, "Happy Spinsters? Singlehood as Experienced by Single Middle-Aged Women," 3.

⁵⁰ Athena Charanne R. Presto, "'Doing Family' From the Standpoint of Single Filipina Migrant Mothers," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 67, no. 2 (February 17, 2025): 272, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00207152251319744>.

⁵¹ As mentioned earlier, Thea, one of the participants in a study among Filipino middle-aged women, contemplated her purpose in the absence of motherhood by being in charge of her nephews. She shared, "If it's

phenomenon of being positioned in the middle, where single women are responsible for the welfare of their parents and the children of their siblings or relatives, is called the *sandwich generation*. Dorothy Miller coined the term to illustrate the “peculiar position” of individuals who provide care for both the younger and elderly members of the family.⁵² Single women perform multiple unpaid care work in the household that is usually invisible due to patriarchal structures.⁵³ This multi-generational care is simultaneously burdened by the economic responsibilities of single women being breadwinners in the family. Single women who hold non-professional jobs proactively reinforce their finances through savings, investments, and other streams of income to cushion their economic resources.⁵⁴ According to the study of Oxfam Pilipinas, the number of women relegated as breadwinners is steadily increasing.⁵⁵ While this is a good sign that women become more active in the public sphere as part of the workforce, it poses further strain on them as they have to juggle both domestic and work responsibilities. Assigning multiple responsibilities to single women is rooted in society’s perception that they are more available, more financially secure, and more reliable. However, it must be noted that there are single women who, despite their multi-generational responsibilities, find fulfillment and joy in financially providing for their families.⁵⁶

not that (motherhood), then I said, my significant contribution to society is I took care of my two precious nephews.” Mendez, “Happy Spinsters? Singlehood as Experienced by Single Middle-Aged Women,” 6.

⁵² Dorothy A. Miller, “The Sandwich Generation: Adult Children of the Aging,” *Social Work* 26, no. 5 (1981): 419, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23712207>.

⁵³ Excelsa C. Tongson, “In Search of Filipino ‘Women in the Middle,’” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 26, no. 4 (November 30, 2020): 478-479, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2020.1847865>.

⁵⁴ Mendez and Ong, “Experiencing Meaning in Life as Thirty-Something Single Filipinas,” 86.

⁵⁵ Oxfam Pilipinas, “Survey: Filipinos Still Believe Gender Stereotypes on Breadwinning, Unpaid Care Work but Positive Changes Seen,” March 28, 2022, <https://philippines.oxfam.org/latest/press-release/survey-filipinos-still-believe-gender-stereotypes-breadwinning-unpaid-care-work>.

⁵⁶ Mendez, “Happy Spinsters? Singlehood as Experienced by Single Middle-Aged Women,” 5.

Other Cultural Norms

The stigma attached to singlehood may be perpetuated in covert ways. When a woman cannot seem to find a match among Filipino men, family, relatives, or peers encourage her, “*Maghanap ka ng AFAM*⁵⁷”(look for a foreign boyfriend), noting that her luck might be with a non-local man. Seeking a foreign boyfriend is proposed as an alternative, with the belief that Western men prefer *exotic*⁵⁸ beauty and can provide a more comfortable life. Some Filipino women, especially those who come from low-income families, choose to marry a foreign man to alleviate themselves and their families from poverty.⁵⁹ These scripts may sound harmless, but they inform us of how the colonial influence of the country is reproduced in contemplating marriage. Unknowingly, these words register a complex colonial relationship between Filipino women and Western men. On the other hand, there are women who prefer dating foreign men because they like their intellectual and physical traits,⁶⁰ which they hardly see in local men, who lack self-motivation and fidelity.⁶¹ Nevertheless, to be pressured to look for men elsewhere for external validation is perturbing.

⁵⁷ AFAM literally means “A Foreigner Assigned in Manila,” which is a common term used to call foreign men in the Philippines.

⁵⁸ It is usually a backhanded description for features that do not reflect Westernized beauty, i.e., darker skin tone, flat nose, etc. This is rooted in the country's colonial beauty standards.

⁵⁹ Donna Lynne L. Demanarig and Javieska Acosta, “Phenomenological Look at the Experiences of Filipina Correspondence or Internet Brides,” *SAGE Open* 6, no. 2 (April 1, 2016): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016654949>.

⁶⁰ Gwenola Ricordeau, “A Case Study about the Global Policing of Third World Intermarried Women: Filipino Women and Marriage Migration,” *Gender and State: Forms Of Administration, Practices and Representations* 51, (2017): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1590/18094449201700510004>.

⁶¹ Ricordeau, “A Case Study about the Global Policing of Third World Intermarried Women,” 9.

Other practices that may prevent single women from fully celebrating and enjoying their choice of being single or not being pressured to find a man stem from unsolicited remarks from the people around them. They may be questioned about their choices or accused of various things. They may be labeled as man-haters, lesbians, or simply not making an effort to find a man. When a woman does not entertain men, the latter often think that she dislikes men or has had traumatic experiences with past lovers. In some situations, her gender becomes a target of speculation, leading to her friendships with women being scrutinized. When she is not seen dating, people assume that she does not socialize as much. While seemingly subtle and a product of pure curiosity, these unsolicited comments can harm her self-concept and relationships.

Claiming their Power and Challenging the Deficit Narratives

Literature that transcends the deficit narratives about single people is growing. In the Philippine context, several studies have debunked the myths about single women. From a global perspective, single women are satisfied with their status as shown by studies that singlehood benefits women's professional growth, autonomy, and emotional well-being.⁶² Filipino single women are now adopting a more open stance on embracing singlehood as compared to the past generation, as they observe that even society's views on marriage are

⁶² Many studies attest to the satisfaction experienced by single women, which challenges the stereotypical views on them. Compared to single men, single women tend to be more satisfied with their status. See, Elaine Hoan and Geoff MacDonald, ""Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves": Gender Differences in Singles' Well-Being," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 16, no. 6 (October 24, 2024): 615, <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241287960>; Dominika Ochnik and Gal Slonim, "Satisfaction With Singlehood in Never-Married Singles: The Role of Gender and Culture," *The Open Psychology Journal* 13, no. 1 (March 19, 2020): 23, <https://doi.org/10.2174/1874350102013010017>.

changing.⁶³ In a study conducted among Filipino single women professionals, the participants expressed that being single is a personal choice that empowers them through authenticity, freedom, and independence. Such a choice contributes to their personal growth, career, and emotional well-being.⁶⁴ Some Filipino single women have accepted their status with the help of faith, believing that their current state is part of God's plan, but without denying the desire to be coupled in the future.⁶⁵ In this situation, even if they still hope to be married someday, their utilization of faith in making sense of their current state is still an agentic response.⁶⁶

Singlehood also aligns with the choice of single women to be authentic to their non-binary gender identity.⁶⁷ Erin Lavender-Stott claims that when we are "queering" singlehood, or we move beyond the heteronormative notion of marriage and family, we oppose the patriarchal and heteronormative structure of family and domestic structure.⁶⁸ Examining singlehood from the perspective of queer lives highlights that partnerships, friendships, and

⁶³ Maria Tamara Isabelle M. Manalo et al., "Self-perceptions of Older Never-married Women in a Fluid and Changing Asian Society: A Narrative Inquiry," *Journal of Women & Aging* 34, no. 5 (September 28, 2021): 665, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952841.2021.1978804>.

⁶⁴ Lenny C. Alonzo and James L. Paglinawan, "Unmarried by Choice: Understanding the Decisions of Stable Professionals to Remain Single," *International Journal of Advance Research and Writing* 7, no. 1 (July 2025): 291-294, <https://ijarw.com/PublishedPaper/IJARW2739.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Samantha Erika N. Mendez, "Sense-Making and Spirituality: Single Filipinas' Lived Experiences of Meaning in Life," *Psychological Studies* 67, no. 3 (June 10, 2022): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-022-00665-8>.

⁶⁶ Mendez, "Sense-Making and Spirituality," 345.

⁶⁷ Alonzo and Paglinawan, "Unmarried by Choice," 292.

⁶⁸ Erin S. Lavender-Stott, "Queering Singlehood: Examining the Intersection of Sexuality and Relationship Status from a Queer Lens," *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 15, no. 3 (2023): 437, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12521>.

other relationships, both romantic and platonic, exist within domestic contexts, challenging conventional expectations.⁶⁹

Amidst the systems of inequality through laws, policies, and norms that normalize the marginalization of single women, single women exercise their autonomy to live according to their terms. Despite receiving pejorative remarks from others, they see singlehood as a self-identified choice that enables them to live authentically.

Where it All Began: Colonial Views of Filipino Women

As explained earlier, the deficit narratives about single women largely arise from the ideology of marriage and family. But this is not simply about Christianity acting as a code for how women, and even men, should live in light of the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is more about how Christianity was a Western colonization import that imposed control and power on women through patriarchy, curtailing their autonomy and self-determination. Remnants of colonial marginalization of women linger in the ideology of marriage and family. This ideology is not accidental, but is rooted in a colonial systematic history of women's subjugation, among other brutal acts justified by the patriarchal Christianity introduced by the Spaniards.

In the pre-colonial Philippines, women had more autonomy and freedom. Even though having a partner was believed to help one reach the afterlife,⁷⁰ it was not pronounced

⁶⁹ Lavender-Stott, "Queering Singlehood," 435.

⁷⁰ Father Pedro Chirino documented that "a woman, whether married or single, could not be saved, who did not have some lover. They said that this man, in the other world, hastened to offer the woman his hand at the passage of a very perilous stream which had no other bridge than a very narrow beam, which must be traversed to reach the repose that they call *Calualhatian*." See Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson, eds., *The Philippine Islands, 1493–1803*, vol. 12 (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1904), 251, <https://name.umd.umich.edu/afk2830.0001.012>.

as a validation of one's womanhood. When the Spaniards set foot on the islands of the Philippines, the inhabitants were initiated into Catholicism. Over three centuries (1565-1898) of colonization left a profound imprint of patriarchy. Women became secondary or auxiliary to men, which was the complete opposite of the pre-colonization *babaylan* (collectively called *babaylanes*) image of women.⁷¹ *Babaylanes* were priestesses in the precolonial era who had political influence and expertise in religious rites, medicine, and nature.⁷² While *babaylanes* were traditionally women, Carolyn Brewer argues that some of them were effeminates called *asog* (Visayas) or *bayog* (Luzon) dressed like women who lived outside the norm of manhood.⁷³ *Babaylanes* were not just empowered women but men whose femininity broke the mold of gender roles. However, this image was altered by the “Maria Clara” image prescribed by Western Christianity. Maria Clara, the muse of Jose Rizal’s novel *Noli Me Tángere*, became the gold standard for womanhood—pious, docile, graceful, and submissive.⁷⁴ The Maria Clara trope was symbolic of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary was exalted during the Spanish occupation as the embodiment of chastity, faith, and passivity. However, her example of leaning towards the marginalized was obscured.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Laura R. Prieto, “Bibles, Baseball and Butterfly Sleeves: Filipina Women and American Protestant Missions, 1900–1930,” in *Divine Domesticities: Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Hyaeweol Choi and Margaret Jolly (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 374, https://www.jstor.org/content/oa_chapter_edited/j.ctt13wwwvck.19?seq=2.

⁷² Zeus A. Salazar, *Ang Babaylan sa Kasaysayan ng Pilipinas*, Bagong Kasaysayan: Lathalain Bilang 4 (Quezon City: Palimbagan ng Lahi, 1999), 6.

⁷³ Carolyn Brewer, “Baylan, Asog, Transvestism, and Sodomy: Gender, Sexuality and the Sacred in Early Colonial Philippines,” *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, no. 2 (May 1999), <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue2/carolyn2.html>.

⁷⁴ Prieto, “Bibles, Baseball and Butterfly Sleeves,” 374.

⁷⁵ Lizette Pearl Galima Tapia, “Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity: Reclaiming Filipino Women’s History and Agency,” *Critical Research on Religion* 12, no. 3 (September 13, 2024): 324-325, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20503032241277490>.

Consequently, women's function and worth distinctively depended on the male figures (i.e., father and husband) in their lives. Obedience to the husband was indoctrinated in the wives by the clergy.⁷⁶ It was a shift from *babaylanes* who led alongside men, held power, and made significant decisions for the government, to Maria Clara, whose identity was defined by her domestic duties and the men in her life.

Aside from the stratification of Filipinos by gender through patriarchy endorsed by Catholicism, women also suffered the further moral weaponry of Catholicism against women. Lizette Pearl Galima Tapia describes how priests used their position of power to incriminate women in the rite of confession: "Perhaps, in the Catholic faith and ritual, the confessional has the most damaging effect on women. While they are passive recipients of abusive sermons that construct them as the curse on humanity by being inherently sinful, in the act of confession, they are active participants in their own denigration."⁷⁷ Not only were women's economic security and social identity tied to men, but also their moral accountability. When a man commits sexual desires toward a woman, she must be tempting him. Or she does not behave appropriately around him, making the man sin. Michel Foucault critiques the middle age Western Christian confession mechanism where the pastor/priest coerces the believers to confess their inmost thoughts and desires as a form of self-examination whereby the flesh is "an evil that afflicted the whole [humanity], and in the most secret of forms."⁷⁸ Confessions were used as a tool to demonize sexuality and govern sexual

⁷⁶ Christine Doran, "Spanish and Mestizo Women of Manila," *Philippine Studies Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 41, no. 3 (May 21, 2012): 283, <https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.4861>.

⁷⁷ Tapia, "Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity," 325.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 20.

behaviors, but most of all to ascertain power by normalizing it, Foucault writes: “The forbidding of certain words, the decency of expressions, all the censorings of vocabulary, might well have been only secondary devices compared to that great subjugation: ways of rendering it morally acceptable and technically useful.”⁷⁹

The colonizers not only dominated the land but also the bodies of women, their consciousness, and their relationship with themselves. The Church, in its catechism, classified women into virgins and whores; virginity was analogous to humanity, and the absence of it was comparable to animality.⁸⁰ Virginity was a colonial concept to the native people.⁸¹ For them, virginity was considered a “misfortune” and “humiliation.”⁸² *Babaylanes* were associated with witchcraft, and the Church accused them of doing evil works. They were rumored to be the *aswang* (monster) that performed cannibalism.⁸³ Carolyn Brewer asserts that the demonization of *babaylanes* was the agenda of Catholic missionaries to dispossess the women spiritual leaders of power and influence.⁸⁴ The persecution and association of women with witchcraft was a prevalent practice in Europe in the sixteenth

⁷⁹ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 21.

⁸⁰ Tapia, “Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity,” 325.

⁸¹ Tapia, “Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity,” 325. Besides women’s licentious activities, animality was used to describe women’s temper, assertiveness, and gossiping. A manual published in 1745 warns parish priests about women acting like animals: “Woman is the most monstrous animal in the whole of Nature, bad-tempered and worse spoken. To have this animal in the house is asking for trouble in the way of tattling, tale-bearing, malicious gossip, and controversies; for wherever a woman is, it would seem impossible to have peace and quiet.” See Ashin Das Gupta, review of *Mary and Misogyny: Women in Iberian Expansion Overseas, 1415-1815, Facts, Fancies and Personalities*, by C.R. Boxer, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13, no. 2 (April–June 1976): 269, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467601300206>.

⁸² Blair and Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, 12: 251.

⁸³ Tapia, “Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity,” 324.

⁸⁴ Brewer, “Baylan, Asog, Transvestism, and Sodomy.”

century. Women were connected to nature and animality, “imbued with far greater sexual passion” than men.”⁸⁵ The alliance of women and witchcraft was an affirmation of women’s relationship with nature, the antithesis of hierarchical systems, and a source of power for oppressed women, Carolyn Merchant opines:

The world of the witches was antihierarchical and everywhere infused with spirits. Every natural object, every animal, every tree contained a spirit whom the witch could summon, utilize, or commune with at will. Witches were thought to make individual pacts with the devil or a demon, usually through an animal familiar. They did not depend on the complicated hierarchical mechanisms of *pneuma* or *spiritus*, to draw down celestial influences...Nor did they depend on hierarchies of demons...The immediacy of individual relationships with a spirit or a demon and the possibility of revenge and control may account for the popularity of witchcraft among oppressed women.⁸⁶

Similarly, *babaylanes* were publicly shamed and punished. Some of them were killed, others were left to be devoured by crocodiles.⁸⁷ The hounding of *babaylanes* by the Church was an act of stripping women of power, ceasing their relationship with nature, and humiliating them at the expense of animals. Aside from the spiritual and moral torment of women, the priests also physically punished them for sexual obscenity as they went bare-chested—an indigenous cultural practice.⁸⁸ Consequently, they were made to adhere to Christian sexual chastity and marital fidelity.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1990), 132.

⁸⁶ Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 140.

⁸⁷ Susanah Lily L. Mendoza and Leny Mendoza Strobel, *Back From the Crocodile’s Belly: Philippine Babaylan Studies and the Struggle for Indigenous Memory*, 2015, 13.

⁸⁸ Tapia, “Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity,” 324.

⁸⁹ Tapia, “Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity,” 324.

Surviving *babaylanes* took part in creating revolutionary forces.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the colonizers' stereotyping of women proliferated in the revolution. Women's role was "downplayed by representing it in terms of their roles as either mothers or sex objects, as exemplars of the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene."⁹¹ Motherhood, a gendered imagery, became a staple symbolism for the nation (e.g., motherland) and the women revolutionary icons. Employing such imagery was observed to be "detrimental to women's interests" and a "significant constraint on the women's movement"⁹² for compartmentalizing women and their roles in the revolution.

Spanish men in the colony, on the other hand, had the liberty of indulging in sexual escapades through prostitution and concubinage. This double standard was reinforced by the belief that those acts were not sinful. Sometimes, they would abandon these women carrying their children once their post in the Philippines was over.⁹³ State and religious institutions indoctrinated women on how to behave and conduct themselves in a male-dominated society. Spanish religious orders founded religious communities (*beaterios*) for Spanish or *mestiza* (Spanish mixed with other races) women who sought a cloistered life.⁹⁴ Houses served as homes for women who were orphaned by their Spanish fathers, abandoned by their husbands,

⁹⁰ Tapia, "Babaylan Feminist Multiplicity," 325.

⁹¹ Christine Doran, "Women, Nationalism and the Philippine Revolution," *Nations and Nationalism* 5, no. 2 (April 1, 1999): 252, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1354-5078.1999.00237.x>.

⁹² Doran, "Women, Nationalism and the Philippine Revolution," 252.

⁹³ Doran, "Spanish and Mestizo Women of Manila," 272.

⁹⁴ Doran, "Spanish and Mestizo Women of Manila," 282.

widows, and women with socially inappropriate behaviors.⁹⁵ Women's colleges educated women in the faith and morals, and trained them on how to act as proper women.⁹⁶

During the American occupation (1898–1946), the Americans put the Philippines under their benevolent assimilation,⁹⁷ meant to “modernize”⁹⁸ the people. Filipino women acquired the American culture through language, culture, and participation in civic life.⁹⁹ Women were able to access more rights except the right to vote, which was formalized in 1937. Education became more attainable for ordinary women. The Americans established a public school system and brought American educators to teach the children. American missionaries observed that women were respected by society.¹⁰⁰ Single women were tapped into the missionary work of American Christian missionaries. Baptist missionary Charles Briggs remarks that single women’s gender was not a hindrance to effective preaching, “Single women can do effective work in the Philippines [because] there is little of the social prejudice against their sex, or of false ideas about womanhood that will hinder [them].” Even

⁹⁵ Doran, “Spanish and Mestizo Women of Manila,” 283–84.

⁹⁶ Doran, “Spanish and Mestizo Women of Manila,” 284–85.

⁹⁷ Benevolent assimilation was declared after the Spanish-American War, signed by the U.S. President William McKinley. The proclamation emphasized that the Americans would not be colonizers to Filipinos but friends: “[T]he future control, disposition, and government of the Philippine Islands are ceded to the United States.... **not as invaders or conquerors, but as friends** (my emphasis), to protect the natives in their homes, in their employments, and in their personal and religious rights.” It was intended to assimilate Filipinos into Western culture. See William McKinley, Executive Order, December 21, 1898, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-132>.

⁹⁸ Prieto, “Bibles, Baseball and Butterfly Sleeves,” 374.

⁹⁹ Prieto, “Bibles, Baseball and Butterfly Sleeves,” 374.

¹⁰⁰ Prieto, “Bibles, Baseball and Butterfly Sleeves,” 373.

if “there is some prejudice against their preaching in public, yet some of them have even done this effectively.”¹⁰¹

It may seem that women had finally attained freedom, respect, and equality, but beneath the surface, vestiges of marginalization and stereotyping remained. Despite the illusion of empowerment, Filipino women suffered from the racial and misogynistic practices of Americans. Many Filipino women saw American men as a way to improve their economic situation.¹⁰² Their situation, however, was further burdened by American men abandoning them and their children.¹⁰³ American men who married Filipino women were shunned by their fellow Americans¹⁰⁴ rooted in their racial prejudice against Filipino women. The relations that formed between Filipino women and American men were not simply free choices but choices legitimized by imperialism¹⁰⁵ through exploitation, racism, and power imbalances.

Even women, both Filipino and American, passed judgment on or perpetuated the stereotyping of Filipino women. For instance, Emily Bronson Conger, the wife of Arthur Latham Conger, a U.S. colonel, contrasted the physical appearance and hygiene of Filipino women with those of Americans:

So many of the women are deformed and unclean, both the makers and the sellers, that it seemed utterly incongruous that they should handle the most delicate materials. In all my observations, I saw but one nice, clean woman of the lower classes. In our happy country we do not think of seeing a whole class of people diseased or maimed.

¹⁰¹ Prieto, “Bibles, Baseball and Butterfly Sleeves,” 376.

¹⁰² Marie Therese Winkelmann, “Dangerous Intercourse: Race, Gender And Interracial Relations in the American Colonial Philippines, 1898 – 1946” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2015), 136, <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/78757>.

¹⁰³ Winkelmann, “Dangerous Intercourse,” 16.

¹⁰⁴ Winkelmann, “Dangerous Intercourse,” 136.

¹⁰⁵ Winkelmann, “Dangerous Intercourse,” 245.

In the Philippines one seldom sees a well-formed person; or if the form is good, the face is disfigured by small-pox.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, even Filipino women who had advanced in education could not depart from the traditional stereotyping of women as mothers and wives. Maria Paz Mendoza-Guazon, the first woman to graduate from the University of the Philippines College of Medicine, advises:

In your preparation, however, never lose sight of the fact that you are women, and Filipino women. As women, your sacred function is to be mothers and wives, the educators of future citizens. In fulfilling this mission, let other interests and engagements be subordinated to that and never try to play two roles at the same time, unless you feel that you are not working injustice upon your children and husbands, your clients if you are a professional, your employees if you are an employer, and yourself.¹⁰⁷

The colonization of women by both Spaniards and Americans portrayed women as individuals whose identity and function depended on the male figures in their lives: first, their fathers, then their husbands. Their bodies were regulated by three institutions: the Church, the state, and the home. Moreover, women's bold and autonomous ways of conducting themselves, whether through speech or bodily expressions, were a threat to these patriarchal institutions that warranted them being called "animals." Their "animality"—the insurgence against the pious image of women—called for being tamed and disciplined. Society believed that womanhood could only find its purpose and meaning within the home through motherhood and wifedom. Despite women proving their excellence inside and outside the home, colonizers and their imperialism told them that they needed a man. Their

¹⁰⁶ Emily Bronson Conger, *An Ohio Woman in the Philippines: Giving Personal Experiences and Descriptions Including Incidents of Honolulu, Ports in Japan and China* (Akron, O.: Press of R.H. Leighton, 1904), 60, <https://archive.org/details/ohiowomaninphili04cong/page/60/mode/2up>.

¹⁰⁷ Maria Paz Mendoza-Guazon, *The Development and Progress of the Filipino Women* (Manila: Bureau of Printing, 1928), 61, in the digital collection *The United States and Its Territories, 1870–1925: The Age of Imperialism*, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, <https://name.umd.umich.edu/agq0460.0001.001>.

worth could only be validated relative to what they could do for their husband and children. Without a man, she was conceived as flawed, inadequate, and incapable. Filipino single women today live with this gendered cultural tension, which they continue to resist and grapple with.

Condition of Companion Animals in the Philippines

Animal rights and welfare groups have gained significant visibility in recent years through social media. Major groups include the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), the Animal Kingdom Foundation (AKF), and CARA Welfare Philippines, whose advocacies span from rescue and rehabilitation, low-cost spay/neuter services, adoption, and campaign and education for the public. Some of these groups were instrumental in the prosecution of individuals who committed violence against animals through the filing of cases. AFK intensively fights against the dog meat industry among their other campaigns. Republic Act No. 8485 or “The Animal Welfare Act of 1998,” undergirds the promotion of the welfare and rights of animals in the Philippines.¹⁰⁸ It was amended in 2013 through Republic Act No. 10631, which stipulates that animal welfare also includes the psychological well-being of animals. The amendment outlines heavier punishments for animal cruelty and neglect.¹⁰⁹ Despite the efforts of these groups and other concerned citizens, animal cruelty continues to proliferate. To provide a clearer picture of how companion animals and other animals are

¹⁰⁸ Philippines, Republic Act No. 8485, *The Animal Welfare Act of 1998*, Congress, approved February 11, 1998, https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra1998/ra_8485_1998.html.

¹⁰⁹ Philippines, Republic Act No. 10631, *An Act Amending Certain Sections of Republic Act No. 8485, Otherwise Known as “The Animal Welfare Act Of 1998,”* Congress, approved October 13, 2013, https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2013/ra_10631_2013.html.

subjected to cruelty, I will outline three animal cases that broadly articulate intertwining issues around animal cruelty within the home, the church, and the community.

A Pregnant Cat Sacked and Passed Around by Youth

In April 2026, a disturbing video surfaced that horrified netizens. In the video, a pregnant cat is sacked and passed around by male and female minors. While the incident is happening, their peers are laughing and seemingly oblivious to the cruelty.¹¹⁰ They harmed not only the cat but also her unborn kittens. In the Philippines, it is believed that cats possess a sharp memory that enables them to return to their original homes. It is a common practice to sack cats when owners want to dispose of them, preventing them from finding their way back. Research indicates that children who are cruel to animals are either curious or have witnessed similar acts.¹¹¹ Some children who abuse animals have experienced domestic violence, different forms of abuse, parental instability (e.g., divorce, incarceration), and deprivation of emotional security.¹¹² Children who inflict pain on pets or stuffed animals are oftentimes victims of sexual abuse.¹¹³ Serial killers also exhibit cruelty toward animals

¹¹⁰ Patricia Dela Roca, "Disturbing video of pregnant cat abused by group of youth sparks outrage online," *Latest Chika*, April 8, 2026, https://latestchika.com/just-in/2026/04/08/120462/disturbing-video-of-pregnant-cat-abused-by-group-of-youth-sparks-outrage-online/?fbclid=IwY2xjawRJC8BleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETF2U3lydDZEU29mbHVQeUFoc3J0YwZhcHBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHqAdruhplI-ruJtPfWT7aJKjQd6-fShAtATHt69NiNjNvK_QVOv_UGEtD0MCG_aem_7QdNRqbD6hxxh15qcnlgog.

¹¹¹ Melissa A. Bright et al., "Animal Cruelty as an Indicator of Family Trauma: Using Adverse Childhood Experiences to Look Beyond Child Abuse and Domestic Violence," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 76 (November 23, 2017): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.11.011>.

¹¹² Bright et al., "Animal Cruelty as an Indicator of Family Trauma," 293-294.

¹¹³ Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 141.

rooted in their experience of abuse as a child.¹¹⁴ Carol Adams argues that this phenomenon is instigated by men's abuse of women and their children. In this dynamic, both the mother and her children are entrapped in a cycle of abuse together with their pets through physical abuse, child sexual abuse, pornography, and the killing of animals. Animals become men's direct subject of abuse, collateral damage of their abuse, or the imagery of the abuse they enact against women's and children's bodies and lives.¹¹⁵ The reality of children exhibiting tendencies toward animal cruelty requires serious reflection, as it is a manifestation of the gravity of patriarchy. Moreover, it speaks volumes about the kindness to animals (or the lack thereof) modeled by adults, which influences children as they grow. Thus, teaching children to care for animals is a structural and collective responsibility that begins at home and must be reinforced at all levels of society.

The Demise of Tiger: A Struggle for Survival

Tiger was an Aspin (Philippine local mixed dog) from Subic who died in March 2025. Tiger was stabbed to death by a woman meat vendor in a public market. Tiger died a grotesque death for allegedly "stealing" meat. Tiger's case sparked widespread online condemnation of animal cruelty. Research indicates that animal cruelty is commonly committed by men more than women. When it is done by women, it tends to be less severe (e.g., neglect, hoarding, poisoning, etc.).¹¹⁶ In a study conducted in the U.S., animal cruelty was observed to be more prevalent among young men who come from lower levels of

¹¹⁴ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 141-142.

¹¹⁵ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 137-145.

¹¹⁶ Laura A. Reese, Joshua J. Vertalka, and Cassie Richard, "Animal Cruelty and Neighborhood Conditions," *Animals* 10, no. 11 (November 11, 2020): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10112095>.

income and education and with histories of antisocial and obsessive-compulsive behaviors.¹¹⁷ While not unheard of, what is surprising in the stabbing of Tiger is the fact that it was performed by a woman. One study posits that women who are predisposed to abuse animals experience psychopathy, sadism, and callousness.¹¹⁸ Studies on women's animal cruelty lack a deeper exploration of its causes. Nonetheless, following the assertion of Carol Adams on men's abuse of women and children in connection with animal abuse can contribute insights into this occurrence. However, I do not know anything about the assailant's history, and thus, making assumptions about her would create more harm than good. Thus, I analyze her act objectively, but not in isolation from other social realities of Filipino women; not to excuse her act but to better understand its intersectional aspects. Her aggressive response to Tiger was a way to safeguard the meat—her economic resource. Filipino women often bear the burden of household work alongside their participation in economic enterprises, whether in the formal or informal economy. The informal economy lacks income security, particularly for enterprises involving basic commodities. For instance, the prices of meat are often poorly regulated during inflation triggered by rising oil costs, thereby diminishing overall sales.

Jeane Peracullo examines hunger through an ecofeminist framework of *kumakalam na sikmura* (gnawing of the stomach), wherein Filipino women struggle with hunger while under pressure to secure food for their families. From an essentialist view, women are often biologically relegated to the role of nourishers. Peracullo argues that poverty and hunger are

¹¹⁷ Michael G. Vaughn et al., "Correlates of Cruelty to Animals in the United States: Results From the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 43, no. 15 (April 21, 2009): 1216-1217, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2009.04.011>.

¹¹⁸ Jane L. Ireland et al., "Animal Abuse Proclivity Among Women: Exploring Callousness, Sadism, and Psychopathy Traits," *Anthrozoös* 35, no. 1 (July 13, 2021): 48-50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2021.1944560>.

pervasive results of multifaceted problems, specifically unjust economic policies that oppress nature and women.¹¹⁹ The piece of meat was symbolic of the struggle for survival of both the woman and Tiger. The woman prevailed, reflecting humans' power over animals.

Meanwhile, it also speaks of women's struggle to make both ends meet. This case is an example of how women and animals experience binding oppression caused by the ongoing destruction of the environment and how imperialism creates global inequalities.

Tiger's hunger was met with grave violence, raising questions about how animals must live with humans. It further asks about the claim of stray animals on Earth's bounty. This is reminiscent of Saint Francis's response to the wolf in the town of Gubbio (see Chapter 3). Instead of eliminating the wolf after it had killed people, Saint Francis reconciled the wolf with the community and promised that the wolf would never be hungry again. Saint Francis urged the community to be accountable for the wolf's survival. Stray animals like Tiger have learned to cross roads, beg for food, and scavenge scraps to survive in the streets. Many of them become victims of shootings, reckless driving, and the merciless humor of people. Tiger's assailant may have been found guilty, but she was not the only perpetrator. The community was equally accountable. The whole community failed to create a culture of hospitality with stray animals, which normalized hurting and treating them as a nuisance. On some rare occasions, humans see them as competitors for survival.

Further examining how humans and animals live together, Republic Act No. 9482, or the "Anti-Rabies Act of 2007," mandates local government units (LGUs) to curb the

¹¹⁹ Jeane C. Peracullo, "Kumakalam na Sigmura: Hunger as Filipino Women's Awakening to Ecofeminist Consciousness," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 31, no. 2 (2015): 35-37, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.2.25>. In a traditional Filipino family, the father or husband serves as the provider. In situations where the father cannot provide, the mother is usually criticized by society for failing to sustain the household.

population of stray dogs and the spread of the rabies virus. Interventions include health initiatives, educational programs, and population control measures. For health and safety, dogs are vaccinated against the virus, and humans are given prompt medical care if they have been bitten by a dog. Educational campaigns and curricular integration are conducted to heighten awareness of the virus and responsible pet ownership. Lastly, stray dogs are seized, impounded, and may be euthanized to control their population.¹²⁰ These measures may look impressive, but in reality, they perpetuate a layered form of animal cruelty. For instance, any dog caught roaming the streets is immediately seized and brought to the pound. No efforts are made to do due diligence, such as inquiring about the owners in the vicinity. Furthermore, the handling of stray dogs is often careless, resulting in dogs getting injured or hurt in the process. In a study in the U.S., the pound model is critiqued for not prioritizing identification and reunification, which severs the bonds between animals and their families. This system disproportionately impacts low-income communities where pets may lack formal identification (like tags or microchips) and where owners face significant financial barriers to reclaiming their animals.¹²¹ Given the pound model in the Philippines, where identification measures are not commonly implemented, the likelihood of reunification is slim, leading animals to face immediate death. Later, I will discuss how the public health measures implemented by the government to control the population of stray dogs are colonial and anthropocentric.

¹²⁰ Philippines, Republic Act No. 9482, *Anti-Rabies Act of 2007*, Congress, approved May 25, 2007, https://paws.org.ph/downloads/ra9482_anti_rabies_act_of_2007.pdf.

¹²¹ Katja M. Guenther and Kristen Hassen, "Coming to Terms With the Legacies of the Pound Model in Animal Sheltering in the United States," *Animals* 14, no. 9 (April 23, 2024): 7, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14091254>.

A Restrained Dove during the Easter Salubong

This Easter 2026, one parish in Malabon City, under the Diocese of Kalookan, went viral with its celebration of the *salubong*. *Salubong* is a Filipino traditional depiction of the reunion of the Risen Christ and his mother, the Virgin Mary, on Easter Sunday. The assembly is divided into two groups, male and female. The male group carries the image of the Risen Christ, while the female group carries the image of the Virgin Mary. The ritual includes an angel, played by a child, who descends (supported by a harness) and removes the veil of Mother Mary, signifying a transition from mourning to joy. The parish in Malabon, instead, suspended a dove attached to balloons by tying the dove's wings to a horizontal stick. The wings were outstretched, as if flying. The dove was made to unveil Mother Mary, with the veil attached to the feet. While it was happening, the assembly was clapping and unaware of the distress caused to the poor bird.¹²² The poor dove was commodified for the spectacle of ritual and did not survive the distress.

Animal welfare organizations and netizens were appalled by the cruel treatment of the dove. Their anger was more fueled by the response of the parish and the diocese. The response missed the whole point of the criticisms against their ritual performance involving a non-consenting animal. The parish released a public apology stating that having pigeons instead of a child dressed as an angel in the ritual was a deliberate choice as a “safer and less distressing alternative.” The parish says:

The parish has long practiced the use of live pigeons—rather than a child dressed as an angel—for several decades, even since after the Second World War, a safer and less distressing alternative...As a community of faith, we are reminded that our devotion must always be guided by compassion and responsibility. In caring for

¹²² When In Manila, “Easter Sunday ‘Salubong’ tradition in Malabon shows a dove with its wings restrained,” April 7, 2026, YouTube video, 0:00:19, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/8No-T78--dI>.

God's creation, we honor the Risen Lord who calls us to protect and cherish every form of life.¹²³



*Fig. 5.1. The dove at the Salubong supported by a contraption, as if crucified, while photographed and watched by the clergy and the assembly.*¹²⁴

While it was good that they no longer practice implicating a child through an unsafe performance, the parish must have thought that having live pigeons suspended midair was any better. It shows how they perceive animals by allowing pigeons to endure pain for the sake of celebrating a ritual. While the parish promised not to involve pigeons in their future

¹²³ The Diocesan Shrine & Parish of Immaculate Conception – Malabon, “Public Apology on Salubong Celebration,” Facebook, April 7, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=973634375001718&set=a.230226616009168>.

¹²⁴ The Diocesan Shrine & Parish of Immaculate Conception – Malabon, “Screenshot of dove restrained live stream of Salubong,” digital image, in “Malabon church criticized for using live dove during ‘Salubong’ event,” by Jeline Malasig, *Interaksyon*, April 7, 2026, <https://interaksyon.philstar.com/trends-spotlights/2026/04/08/311701/malabon-parish-diocese-apologize-dove-incident-salubong-ceremony/>.

celebration of the *salubong*, there is no clear action plan on how they will conduct their future ritual celebrations. Moreover, corrective measures were not offered.

During the celebration, Kalookan Bishop Pablo Virgilio “Ambo” David (also designated the title of “Cardinal”) and other members of the clergy were present, but none of them reacted to the incident or showed any sign of being unsettled. Bishop David released a statement thereafter:

It is regrettable. Had I been aware of this beforehand, I would not have approved. I sincerely appreciate the concern expressed for the well-being of the pigeon, as well as for the environment—particularly marine life that may be harmed by deflated balloons...At the same time, I cannot help but wish that we showed the same moral urgency and collective outrage for the loss of human life. We have witnessed people killed on mere suspicion of drug use. We now see innocent civilians—including young students—caught in the violence of war, as conflicts continue to escalate and devastate entire societies. Our compassion should not be selective. If we are capable of being deeply disturbed by harm done to animals and to nature, then all the more should we be moved—consistently and passionately—by the suffering and destruction of human lives. Only when our sense of moral concern becomes whole, and not fragmented, can we truly say that we are defending life in all its dignity.¹²⁵

The Bishop’s statement expresses regret about the well-being of the pigeon and the environmental consequences of the activity. But he continues with troubling points. Bishop David is dismayed that people are not as sorrowful about extra-judicial killings, war violence, and political conflicts across the globe, noting that “our compassion should not be selective.” As he stresses, this “selective compassion” is double-standard and partial, assuming that the people who were outraged by the ritual were not at all angered by the senseless deaths of people. By mentioning the lack of concern of people for the loss of human lives, he deflects the ‘animal question,’ the important matter at hand. It was a missed opportunity to provide a pastoral action. His statement does not attempt to recover the value

¹²⁵ Pablo Virgilio David, “SALUBONG,” Facebook, April 7, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1KFWRDeYZ8/>.

of animals in our theological and pastoral life. It fails to present how concern for animals can bridge compassion for human life as a continuous and circular articulation of compassion, not a divided and exclusive one. Lastly, the statement does not invite people to contemplate how ritual should focus more on its meaning, rather than on performance and spectacle, which may call for involving lives to make ritual captivating and palpable. Pope Francis teaches in *Desiderio Desideravi* that liturgy must be celebrated with a judicious choice of elements that will highlight the focal point of the celebration—the paschal mystery. Pope Francis remarks that “every aspect of the celebration must be carefully tended to (space, time, gestures, words, objects, vestments, song, music)...Such attention would be enough to prevent robbing from the assembly what is owed to it; namely, the paschal mystery.”¹²⁶ Conversely, the negligent incorporation of an animal in the ritual did not just deny the assembly of religious substance. It was an utter disservice to the whole nonhuman creation that Christ united in his paschal mystery. Denis Edwards postulates through the theology of deep incarnation that Christ assumed humanity—flesh and blood—so that he may be with, suffer with, and save the whole cosmos.¹²⁷ Therefore, the death of the dove was unnecessary, senseless, and a colossal disregard for Christ’s paschal mystery.

¹²⁶ Francis, *Desiderio Desideravi* [Apostolic Letter on The Liturgical Formation of the People of God], The Holy See, June 29, 2022, sec. 23, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/20220629-lettera-ap-desiderio-desideravi.html.

¹²⁷ In his book, Denis Edwards reviewed the development of the theology of deep incarnation, which was originally proposed by Niels Gregersen. Gregersen first attended to reconciling God’s mercy with the existential question of suffering involved in evolutionary processes. His theology posits that the Incarnation is a materially binding reality that extends to all creation, both biologically and evolutionarily. Christ’s becoming human was meant to offer life and provide care for the whole creation, even in its suffering and death. Deep incarnation conveys that creation is not alone in its suffering, deterioration, death, and extinction. Christ suffers with creation. Edwards then examined the contributions of Elizabeth Johnson, Celia Deane-Drummond, Christopher Southgate, and Richard Bauckham in constructing the theology. See Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God’s Redemptive Suffering with Creatures* (Orbis Books, 2019), 1–20.

The event has proven that the Church can also be a site for reproducing animal cruelty. Sometimes, animal cruelty is obscured in sacred worship, in front of church leaders and members alike, who have read or at least know the central message of *Laudato Si'*. Compassion for animals is not born out of memorized edicts but an embodied spirituality developed through intentional and ongoing relationships with animals and the rest of creation. Compassion for animals in ritual is no longer questionable in the Philippine Church when animals are not used as props, but are regarded as kin.

On the other hand, it is an oversimplification to say that this is the complete picture of the Church's relationship with animals. Appreciation for animals within the Church has become more noticeable in recent years. Some parishes have adopted dogs. These dogs are present during Masses and act like sacristans, sometimes as choir members. People find joy in their presence in liturgy. This resonates with Saint Francis permitting a lamb to join him and the entire assembly in celebrating Mass in Chapter 3. Normalizing a regular animal presence in parishes somehow diminishes the gap between the human-animal divide. But why do people appreciate dogs but not have the same empathy for doves? Although not conclusive, this may be related to the studies I cited in Chapter 4. Non-traditional pets or other animal species do not receive the same esteem due to their distinctive appearance, cultural symbolism, or societal aversion. As I stressed previously, we must transcend our personal preferences or familiarity to build genuine fellowship with animals. This is why entangled empathy matters. Even if the animal is completely different from what we grew up with or see around us, entangled empathy asks us to give the animal the same respect and care. Admittedly, it demands a lot of work to unlearn the boundaries we have acquired that separate animals into classifications (pets, edible animals, wild animals, etc.). Alongside this,

it is worth stating how ecclesial powers can disrupt and challenge human domination over animals. With appropriate pastoral interventions, the Church can slowly contribute to this process. The programs/efforts I suggested in Chapter 4 may be of great help.

Relationship Between Indigenous People and Animals

After presenting modern-day cases of the entanglement of animals and humans in Philippine society, I examine how Indigenous people connected with animals. Historical data on human-animal relations within indigenous cultures serve as a benchmark for determining how colonization shifted notions of animals from an animistic perspective to a heavily anthropocentric, patriarchal, and capitalist one. It is important to note, however, that by today's animal welfare understanding, pre-colonial Filipinos had maintained a unique conviviality with animals. This nuanced bond was premised on kinship within their animistic worldview that considered both animals and inanimate things to possess souls.¹²⁸

Indigenous Filipinos' relationships with animals were determined by the animals' labor, food value, companionship, and spiritual role. There was no uniform way of treating animals across the Philippine islands, but there were shared similarities. Each region had slight differences in its practice based on its local culture and beliefs. In the Mountain

¹²⁸ Arun W. Jones, "A View from the Mountains: Episcopal Missionary Depictions of the Igorot of Northern Luzon, The Philippines, 1903-1916," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 71, no. 3 (2002): 393, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42612281>.

Evidence suggests that the religious practice of animism in pre-colonial Philippines had Chinese, Hindu, and Muslim influences. The worship of nature and the incorporation of jars and gongs is proposed to be a Chinese influence. The deity *Bathala* is linked to the Sanskrit term *bhattra* (respectable, considerable), as is the word *diwata* (deity). However, it is contested that *Bathala* is derived from *Bata-Allah*, which means "child of Allah." See Stephen K. Hislop, "Anitism: A survey of religious beliefs native to the Philippines," *Asian Studies*, 9(2) (1971): 144-146, <https://www.asj.upd.edu.ph/mediabox/archive/ASJ-09-02-1971/hislop-anitism-survey-religious%20beliefs-native-philippines.pdf>.

Province, for example, animals were integral community members—acting as sources of knowledge, ritual participants, and historical emblems.¹²⁹

Archaeological evidence supports this deep history of integration. Excavated remains in Batanes and Nagsabaran suggest that dog domestication and formal burials date back at least 2,500 years. Yet, cut marks on these same bones indicate that dogs were also consumed, specifically by men.¹³⁰ This highlights the multifaceted role of animals. They were both companions and resources. While Indigenous inhabitants foraged, hunted, and fished, their diet did not rely primarily on meat. Most communities consumed root crops, fruits, and rice.

Domestication practices further illustrate this proximity. In Visayan culture, households would raise four to six dogs for this purpose. Dogs were domesticated with cats. Pigs were not confined in a pen but lived on the ground floor of the house.¹³¹ In the Visayan culture, pigs held a special role that contrasts with how they are treated today. They were believed to be cleaner than dogs.¹³² Pigs and chickens were part of ritual offerings aside from

¹²⁹ Iö Mones Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course: Dogs, Dog Meat, and the Igorot Trope,” *The Cordillera Review* XI, no. 1–2 (March–September 2021): 34, <https://thecordillerareview.upb.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2-Jularbal-21-De.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Philip J. Piper et al., “The Terrestrial Vertebrate Remains,” in *4000 Years of Migration and Cultural Exchange: The Archaeology of the Batanes Islands, Northern Philippines*, ed. Peter Bellwood and Eusebio Dizon, vol. 40 (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013), 197, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hg91.15>.

¹³¹ Francisco Ignacio Alcina, *History of the Bisayan People in the Philippine Islands: Evangelization and Culture at the Contact Period*, trans. Cantius J. Kobak and Lucio Gutiérrez, vol. 1 (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2002), 121, <https://archive.org/details/historyofbisayan0001alci/page/120/mode/2up>.

¹³² William Henry Scott, *Barangay: Sixteenth-Century Philippine Culture and Society* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1994), 46, https://ia802800.us.archive.org/32/items/BarangaySixteenthCenturyPhilippineCultureAndSociety/Barangay%20-%20Sixteenth%20Century%20Philippine%20Culture%20and%20Society_text.pdf.

being consumed.¹³³ Monkeys were also domesticated as pets who alerted the household upon seeing strangers.¹³⁴

Dogs taken for hunting were carefully selected for their outstanding traits. They were given special care against spells and poisons. Intimacy with dogs was observed as they were provided affection—carried on the shoulders and given kisses (nose-to-nose contact).¹³⁵ Aside from kissing and hugging them, Visayan women slept beside them, sharing with them their blankets. At the retirement of hunting dogs, they were freed and not killed.¹³⁶

Hunting was neither capitalist nor consumption-driven labor. For example, in the Visayan practice, the first caught animal would be offered to *Banwanun* (a spirit dwelling in the forests). The remaining catch would be shared with the community and not be sold or preserved.¹³⁷ They would not hunt more than they needed. Similarly, inhabitants from Mindanao and Luzon believed that animals, alongside plants and other elements of nature, were protected by spirits. Hence, gatherers would bring an offering for the spirits that oversaw bees or wild game.¹³⁸

Animals were central in ritual performance. Animals as offerings were seen as conduits for the interconnectedness of life.¹³⁹ The pre-colonial ritual offering called *paganito*

¹³³ Scott, *Barangay*, 46.

¹³⁴ Scott, *Barangay*, 46.

¹³⁵ Scott, *Barangay* 43-44.

¹³⁶ Malcolm W. Mintz, *The Philippines at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century with Particular Reference to the Bikol Region*, Monograph 1 of *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: Australian National University, 2011), chap. 17, sec. 8, http://intersections.anu.edu.au/monograph1/mintz_hunting.html.

¹³⁷ Scott, *Barangay*, 44.

¹³⁸ Scott, *Barangay*, 168.

¹³⁹ Jularbal, "From Main Ritual to Main Course," 34.

or *maganito* was performed by a *babaylan*.¹⁴⁰ As an act of worship, it served as a way for the living to communicate with spirits. It was conducted to ensure the fertility of harvests, newlyweds, and domestic animals; to invoke nature's providence, such as rain or good weather; to seek deliverance for the sick and the dead; and to mitigate epidemics.¹⁴¹ Even the poor performance of hunting dogs was a reason to perform *paganito*, serving to protect the animals from being downtrodden by witchcraft.¹⁴² In other words, *paganito* was a community intervention aimed at maintaining a well-balanced life through the aid of spirits. Animal sacrifice was central to this worship, with offerings spanning a variety of species depending on the culture. The most common were pigs, chickens, carabaos, and dogs, among others. William Henry Scott, American historian of the Philippines, describes how the *babaylan* worked with the animal offering in the ritual and how the community fed on it:

The babaylan was then divested of her accoutrements and awakened from her trance, while the hog was singed, butchered, and cooked. The feasting then began, everybody receiving a share, though the flesh touched by the spear was reserved for the babaylan. Some of the meat was taken down to an altar on the seashore or riverbank where, after prayers, it was placed on a little raft together with the altar and all other paraphernalia, and set adrift. This brought the ritual to a close though the celebrating continued.¹⁴³

Animals in the *paganito* were both recipients and givers. As recipients, hunting dogs and domestic animals were bestowed with strength and fertility. As givers, certain animals were sacrificed to satisfy the community's petitions for the benefit of humans or other livestock. This highlights how kinship with animals was shaped by spiritual values attributed

¹⁴⁰ Scott, *Barangay*, 83-84.

¹⁴¹ Scott, *Barangay*, 84.

¹⁴² Scott, *Barangay*, 84.

¹⁴³ Scott, *Barangay*, 85.

to them. Spirituality functioned as a fluid, non-static realm that permitted many expressions of kinship, rooted in the community's adaptability to the forces of nature.

The roles of animals in spirituality are further nuanced by their function as messengers. Animals are regarded as spiritual vessels of the living by connecting them with their departed loved ones. Specifically, in the Mountain Province, animals such as snakes, monkeys, and insects embody the spirits of ancestors. While snakes often have ominous cultural symbolism elsewhere, people from the Mountain Province distinguish them for their clairvoyance and the ability to foretell impending danger. Thus, seeing snakes signals the need for heightened vigilance in their environment.¹⁴⁴ Animal behaviors are signifiers of natural calamities or natural phenomena that are about to happen.¹⁴⁵

Some animal species were both feared and revered by the inhabitants. Crocodiles, often called *nono* (grandparent), were among these species. The Tagalogs would offer pigs to crocodiles as a sign of reverence and appeal to be spared from harm. This complex relationship with crocodiles shows how animals also held power over humans.¹⁴⁶

In terms of human-animal association, animals were frequently used as references for human identity. Interestingly, people were named after animals whose traits they resembled.¹⁴⁷ While some animal associations were based on blunt observations of physical attributes or behaviors,¹⁴⁸ the practice was not based on a hierarchical form of humiliation that debased animals. Through this practice, Indigenous people identified with animals, or

¹⁴⁴ Jularbal, "From Main Ritual to Main Course," 35.

¹⁴⁵ Jones, "A View from the Mountains," 395.

¹⁴⁶ Hislop, "Anitism: A survey of religious beliefs native to the Philippines," 149.

¹⁴⁷ Scott, *Barangay*, 97.

¹⁴⁸ Scott, *Barangay*, 97.

humans became an extension of animals. This signifies that the close association between humans and animals was not viewed negatively. In Chapter 2, I analyzed how the Filipino language, as it is used today, employs animal metaphors in derogatory ways. However, this indigenous-specific naming practice was geared toward distinctive identification rather than humiliation. This also speaks to the observance of the shared similarities between humans and animals, which is the opposite of *anthropodenialism* that I explained in Chapter 2.

Overall, human-animal relations in pre-colonial Philippines were represented by a multi-layered bond. Their bond blurred the boundaries of space as humans and animals shared the domicile and intersected identities through the practice of giving animal names to humans. It also nuanced the tension between consumption and spirituality, and negotiated their power dynamics in the context of rituals.

Commodification and Colonization of Animals and Humans

Animals in the Colonial Capitalist Systems

At the advent of the Spaniards' colonial pursuits, besides Christianizing the archipelago, they also remodeled the market system. They established a new system for trading meat, regulated by the Audiencia of Manila. This entity processed the licensing of hunters, requiring at least one animal to be butchered daily.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, Spanish missionaries introduced the *arado*, a new technology for plowing, to the farmers¹⁵⁰ for faster production. Records suggest that the use of draft animals, specifically for lifting and

¹⁴⁹ Scott, *Barangay*, 201.

¹⁵⁰ Scott, *Barangay*, 201.

transporting heavy loads, was only introduced during the Spanish era.¹⁵¹ Previously, the transportation of cargo was performed manually. These technologies meant to improve work efficiency, which was profitable for the economy. Capitalism was at the core of these models, driving faster turnouts, greater efficiency, and increasing demands. Within this industry, animals were used for labor and consumed on a larger scale. It was a stark contrast to how the Indigenous Filipinos worked with and consumed animals, which were not for profit and mass-scale consumption. The concept of kinship between humans and animals was obliterated in the process.

The importation of animals, both living and processed, was part of the economic scheme of the Spaniards. Aside from introducing new agricultural technology, the Spanish government imported cattle and carabaos from Southeast Asian regions. This importation brought epidemics like rinderpest that were unfamiliar to the veterinary science of the Spanish government.¹⁵² Processed animal products (e.g., ham, butter, preserved meats) entered the colony's gastronomical culture, even if they were primarily for Spanish consumption.¹⁵³ This trend was indeed a precursor to how Filipinos eventually mass-produced preserved animal products, which added to the marketability of livestock.

While animal butchery was tied to the economic stake of the colonizers, Queeny Lapeña and Stephen Acabado argue that the Ifugao of the northern Philippines intensified their ritual offering of pigs as a form of political resistance against the Spaniards. Their

¹⁵¹ Scott, *Barangay*, 125, 198.

¹⁵² Arleigh Ross Dela Cruz, "Epizootics and the Colonial Legacies of the United States in Philippine Veterinary Science," *International Review of Environmental History* 2 (September 2016): 150, <https://doi.org/10.22459/ireh.02.2016.05>.

¹⁵³ Scott, *Barangay*, 208.

research posits that the Ifugao's ritual feasting increased the tribe's cohesion and mobilization against colonial encroachment.¹⁵⁴ If we look at this case through the lens of ethical principles, it provides a different dimension of human-animal relations. Therefore, this practice must be analyzed within the context of the tribe's ritual performance. It highlights how animals are implicated in a human endeavor of resistance against colonizers.

Colonial Sciences, Sanitation, and Urbanization

When the Americans succeeded the Spaniards, the American colonial administration prioritized public health, which entangled both humans and animals in a sustained effort to maintain a narrative of sanitation. In truth, however, it was colonial domination rather than a genuine welfare service. For instance, the control of the spread of leprosy was part of the “civilization” project of the Americans for fear of the disease's spread. As a result, people with leprosy were forcefully segregated on the island of Culion,¹⁵⁵ and isolated from their loved ones and society.

On the other hand, the American government implemented strict health measures on animals through its veterinary science arm. Arleigh Ross Dela Cruz maintains that the veterinary science of the Americans, which later became the model for Philippine veterinary science, was a logic of imperialism and domination. American veterinary science treated

¹⁵⁴ Queeny G. Lapeña and Stephen B. Acabado, “Resistance Through Rituals: The Role of Philippine ‘Native Pig’ (*Sus Scrofa*) in Ifugao Feasting and Socio-political Organization,” *Journal of Archaeological Science Reports* 13 (June 2017): 593, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jasrep.2017.05.009>.

¹⁵⁵ Kusaka Wataru, “Discipline and Desire: Hansen's Disease Patients Reclaim Life in Culion, 1900–1930s,” *Social Science Diliman* 13 (2) (July-December 2017): 6, <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/socialsciencediliman/article/download/5986/5340>.

indigenous knowledge and animals as inferior, subsequently reducing them to subjects for experimentation. Dela Cruz writes:

The development of Philippine veterinary science under the Americans proved how the new colonisers, just like their Spanish predecessors, could demonstrate their supremacy over nature and at the same time reduce the country's tropical environment to a new conceptual and physical territory 'over which they could gain mastery and exercise dominion'.¹⁵⁶

Inoculation served as a tool to further American scientific control over animals. Animal mortality rose due to the American veterinarians' irresponsible assessment of the condition of animals before inoculation.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile, the veterinarians lost the trust of Filipino farmers as their farm animals worsened after the inoculation.¹⁵⁸

Stray dogs were subjected to imperial interventions that significantly widened the human-animal divide. Nicolo Paolo Ludovice contends in his dissertation that the concept of "stray animals" is a byproduct of urbanization, which is a combination of land use, migration of both humans and animals, food availability, and other human-facilitated developments that may invariably deny animals of space and resources for survival.¹⁵⁹ The control of stray dogs in Manila during the Spanish occupation was intended to improve the urban planning of the area.¹⁶⁰ It was part of the Spanish colonial social organization and demarcation. Stray dogs in Manila were seen as a direct impediment to this plan. In accordance with this, Governor-General Simon de Anda enacted a law on February 17, 1772, that pronounced the elimination

¹⁵⁶ Dela Cruz, "Epizootics and the Colonial Legacies," 145.

¹⁵⁷ Dela Cruz, "Epizootics and the Colonial Legacies," 159.

¹⁵⁸ Dela Cruz, "Epizootics and the Colonial Legacies," 159-160.

¹⁵⁹ Nicolo Paolo P. Ludovice, "Domesticated Geographies: Animals and the Making of Modern Health in the Philippines, 1860-1935" (PhD diss., University of Hong Kong, 2021), 351.

¹⁶⁰ Ludovice, "Domesticated Geographies," 353.

of stray dogs and other animals. The law ascertained that dogs caught destroying property or causing damage would be put to death.¹⁶¹

Due to the emergence of the rabies virus, public anxiety heightened. All stray dogs were feared as rabid and unsanitary. Both colonial governments (Spanish and American) were inundated with the threat of rabies to public health, which led to more stringent protocols that exacerbated the marginalization of stray dogs. Stray dogs were poisoned with strychnine (a crystalline substance) devised by the Spanish government.¹⁶² Ludovice laments how stray dogs were caught in between being domesticated, but at the same time excluded from society's social affairs, leading them to exist in the peripheries of the public, often ignored until they became a public health issue:

[S]tray dogs emerged as liminal creatures caught in-between processes of urbanization and health. Stray dogs did not belong solely to nature, as most had adapted to their environment, yet they were excluded from the city's activities. Although they lived outside the social world, their survival depended on the waste generated by that world. As Mary Douglas puts it, stray dogs are anomalous creatures: "When something is firmly classed as anomalous, the outline of the set in which it is not a member is clarified." As a consequence of their displacement, their existence remained peripheral and largely ignored until they caused disruptions to the health of the majority.¹⁶³

The elimination of stray animals under Spanish rule concurs with Yamini Narayanan's critique of the contemporary street dog management in India. Narayanan's work lends the term "colonizer" a new anthropocentric meaning, in which humans displace animals in urban space through the narrative of "formality" built into urban planning and policy. This colonial logic prioritizes human health at the expense of animals, depicting them

¹⁶¹ Ludovice, "Domesticated Geographies," 353.

¹⁶² Ludovice, "Domesticated Geographies," 360.

¹⁶³ Ludovice, "Domesticated Geographies," 357-358.

as a backdrop for ‘informality,’ and conceptualizing urban space as an exclusively human domain. It idealizes a city where no animals are in sight to threaten public health, safety, and aesthetics. Narayanan argues that this is not just about health, but a refusal to include stray animals in the concept of space and visibility:

Narratives which marginalise nonhumans are likewise supported by processes of informality in the city, whereby animals’ ways of accessing and utilising urban spaces and their right to a healthy, safe city fall outside the ambit of formality and, thus, protection. By disregarding the ‘animal city’ as a concern for formality and therefore implicitly displacing it to a space and status of informality, the ‘legitimate’ city is allowed to colonise and exploit the ‘non-legitimate’. Informality allows planning to treat the human relationship with the nonhuman animal as one of coloniser-colonised, removing any possibility of the recognition of the participation and political agency of urban nonhumans and their rights to existence, safety and even visibility.¹⁶⁴

Stray animals in Manila, therefore, experienced multiple forms of colonization. The colonial administrators brought their anthropocentric and colonial ideals to the islands to impose Western urbanization that excluded animals. As this colonial legacy was adopted and is sustained by local urban governance up to this day, stray animals are marginalized as ‘non-legitimate’ in their own land.

Clearly, colonial veterinary science, sanitation, and urbanization were triple threats to animal flourishing during the Spanish and American occupation. Animal and human diseases were perceived as anomalies in the attainment of development and modernity. Isolation and removal were the immediate solutions to eliminate these diseases, to the detriment of both animals and humans. Moreover, the treatments developed to cure animal diseases were ineffective. They served as mere extensions of colonial scientific experimentation that advanced imperial regimes in the tropics.

¹⁶⁴ Yamini Narayanan, “Street Dogs at the Intersection of Colonialism and Informality: ‘Subaltern Animism’ as a Posthuman Critique of Indian Cities,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 3 (2017): 481, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816672860>.

The Igorot in the U.S.

Upon the arrival of the Spaniards in the 1500s, they observed that the Indigenous inhabitants did not have an organized religion. Stephen Hislop asserts that for the Spaniards, an organized religion must have formal leadership succession, scriptures, and temples.¹⁶⁵ Their animism was regarded as a paganistic belief contradicting the Western, monotheistic orthodoxy. The practice of animism, connected to animal evocation, was demonized and replaced. Furthermore, their animistic belief system—specifically the ritual of animal sacrifice—became a subject of the colonial gaze, creating narratives of savagery and backwardness. In the context of the Igorot,¹⁶⁶ the Spanish colonizers constructed an acute form of *othering*, framing the tribe as lacking in civility. They generalized the Igorot's sacrifice of dogs as an ordinary occurrence, rather than a rare event, calling attention to its “grossness and repugnance.”¹⁶⁷ Moreover, they omitted or ignored (to say the least) the strict prescriptions followed by the Igorot in doing such ritual sacrifice—including the manner of slaying the animal and the designated people to conduct it.¹⁶⁸

The Igorot people were subjected to prejudice, labeled as primitive, savage, and uncivilized—characteristics that the Americans wanted to “discipline” in the Indigenous people. Their culture and way of life became a spectacle of curiosity and entertainment when the Americans brought them to the United States to be “exhibited” at the 1904 St. Louis

¹⁶⁵ Hislop, “Anitism: A survey of religious beliefs native to the Philippines,” 146-147.

¹⁶⁶ The term “Igorot” refers to the Indigenous people in the northern part of Philippines which includes the groups Bontoc, Ibaloi, Ifugao, Isneg, Kalinga, Kankanaey, and Tingguian.

¹⁶⁷ Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course,” 37-38.

¹⁶⁸ Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course,” 39.

World's Fair.¹⁶⁹ The exhibit was not a cultural exposition but a “human zoo,” designed to justify the colonial rule of the Americans. It suggested that the Philippines needed to be emancipated from its primitive life. The Igorot began to be stereotyped as a “dog-eating” people, a trope that was later broadly associated with Filipinos.¹⁷⁰ Igorot participants were coerced into performing scheduled dog sacrifices and cooking demonstrations,¹⁷¹ which distorted the original intent of their ritual practice.

¹⁶⁹ Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course,” 42. The purpose of the St. Louis World’s Fair was conveyed by Albert Jenks, quoted by June Prill-Brett: “The purpose of the ethnologic exhibit at the Exposition in the States is twofold: first, the American visitor may have an opportunity to understand the different tribes of people in these Islands. There will be representatives from all the various stages of culture, from the least-civilized..., the semi-civilized..., to the civilized and cultured.... They will also be represented as naturally as possible so the Americans at home can get as good an idea of the Philippine people as possible without actually visiting the Islands. The second reason for sending them is so that the Filipinos may have a much better idea of what America really is and what her people are with the result, it is hoped, that seed sown in the Islands by the visitors to America, when they return to their homes in the Philippines, will result in the fruits of peace, industry, and progress along the lines of American ideals for the Islands.” Albert Jenks’s elaboration of the purpose of the fair is saturated with colonial presumptions. He emphasizes hierarchical classifications of civilization, that one is better or worse than another. American culture is depicted as a definitive standard for progress—an enviable one that deserves to be imitated and exported back to the Philippines. See June Prill-Brett, “Voices from the Other Side: Impressions from Some Igorot Participants in U.S. Cultural Exhibitions in the Early 1900s,” *The Cordillera Review: Journal of Philippine Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (March 2009): 27, <https://thecordillerareview.upb.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/3-TCR-I-1-Brett.pdf>.

¹⁷⁰ Prill-Brett, “Voices from the Other Side,” 28.

¹⁷¹ Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course,” 42.



Fig. 5.2. “Killing a dog for a feast.” In the photo is a group of Igorot men at the St. Louis World’s Fair holding a beheaded dog as a sacrifice. Dogs were supplied by the organizers on a daily basis for the orchestration of the ritual performance.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Jessie Tarbox Beals, “Killing a dog for a feast,” 1904, photograph, Jessie Tarbox Beals Photographs Louisiana Purchase Exhibition, St. Louis Public Library, <https://cdm17210.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/beals/id/151/rec/3>.



Fig. 5.3. “Starving for Want of Dog.” The St. Louis World’s Fair institutionalized stereotypes of the Igorot, leading to racist media portrayals like this November 10, 1905, San Francisco Chronicle editorial cartoon. It warns Americans to be watchful of their pets in the presence of the Igorot.¹⁷³

The historical exhibitions of the Igorot and their rituals curated a false image of the Igorot. Consequently, their ritual was weaponized against them, treated as an attribute incongruent with Western ideals of propriety, progress, and civilization. Moreover, their deep connection with animals was perceived with disgust, as the organizers fabricated a show

¹⁷³ “Starving for Want of Dog,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 10, 1905, editorial cartoon and article, in “Nakimalika: or We, Igorots, Participated,” Filipino American Center (blog), May 21, 2014, <https://filipinoamericancenter.blogspot.com/2014/05/nakimalika-or-we-igorots-participated.html>.

meant to entertain. As the Igorot became victims of colonial force, so did the animals utilized in the rituals. They were either instrumentalized to describe the “brute” traits of the Igorot or slain for the satisfaction of the bored Western audience.

Tagkhay, an Igorot woman recruited for cultural exhibitions that followed the St. Louis World’s Fair, was interviewed in the 1960s. She recalled that their managers made them observe the way of life of Americans, telling them:

“Now that we Americans have seen your customs and way of living, it is our turn to show you how American life is.” We were shown how they built houses, what they did for their entertainment, how they farmed with the use of machines, how they raised their pigs and chickens for the primary purpose of selling and not for rituals.¹⁷⁴

Tagkhay’s managers made a sharp comparison regarding American use of animals for commerce rather than ritual. It implied that the Igorot’s manner of relating to animals was atypical and completely different from Americans’ distant relationship with animals.

American missionaries echoed this same comparison. When American missionaries went to the Mountain Province to expand their missionary work, one frustration they had was Igorot’s apparent lack of motivation to work or earn money. Missionaries saw the Igorot only interested in working for subsistence and found that their “wants [were] few” to be disappointing.¹⁷⁵ For the Americans, the conservative view of the Igorot on subsistence was primitive and anti-progress, needing to be transformed to fit the idealized American culture of productivity.

¹⁷⁴ Prill-Brett, “Voices from the Other Side,” 38.

¹⁷⁵ Jones, “A View from the Mountains,” 390.

Postcolonial Ecofeminist Analysis

In this comprehensive survey of the context of Filipino single women and companion animals, both in the present day and in their colonial histories, I examined how their societal marginalization has been shaped by colonial influences. Their bodies, agency, and existence were commodified and colonized. One important insight generated by this investigation is the reality of the intersection of the oppression of women and animals under the banner of colonial regimes. Contained in their overlapping histories are fragments of colonial and imperial forces that linger in their systemic subjugation today, which is often quiet, unnoticed, and justified—a manifestation of ambient violence. Bringing these historical facts to the surface is a precondition for decolonization, which should examine the maintenance of these colonial structures and recover indigenous practices that affirm the dignity of both groups.

When accounting for the impacts of environmental degradation, women tend to endure greater effects than men as they have been assigned socially constructed domestic functions linked to the environment and are denied access to resources.¹⁷⁶ Parallel to this, imperialism still has a foothold in all domains of Philippine society. The case of Tiger and the woman is a concrete example of how imperialism and colonialism are entrenched in the lives of women and animals, manifested through economic vulnerability, poverty, and food insecurity. Imperialism and colonialism affect how we relate to animals today. The human-animal divide—widened by colonial influences and global inequalities brought by neoliberal policies that dictate how basic goods are priced and traded—reflects how women and animals struggle to survive. Beyond economic policies, institutional structures like the

¹⁷⁶ Brazal, “Ethics of Care,” 225.

Catholic Church have also historically dispossessed both women and animals of the capacity to thrive due to patriarchal regimes. While it has tempered disempowering both, the Church still needs to grow in honoring animals as part of creation worthy of moral consideration, regardless of species. Kwok Pui-lan captures the intertwined marginalization of single women and companion animals in the postcolonial Philippines, where women's bodies, autonomy, and productivity are exploited alongside nature:

In this drastic altering of the natural environment, colonized women's relation to nature changed, as did their social status. Prior to colonization, these women could gather and grow their food and bring it to the market, and their economic roles in the family were valued and important...The colonizers also introduced their marriage system and gender arrangements, resulting often in the curtailment of the power of colonized women...The control of colonized women's sexuality and reproductive labor was key to the colonial enterprise.¹⁷⁷

As single women and companion animals continue to be oppressed, the question is how we remove the shackles of colonial and imperial forces sustained by patriarchal domains. Given the inherent structure around colonialism, Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang remark that decolonization is "the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted."¹⁷⁸ While Tuck and Yang propose that decolonization must center on returning the stolen land, their framework insists on the recognition of the people's relations to the land. In connection with the indigenous relationship with the land, it is necessary to revive these ancestral bonds with nonhuman life. On the issue of dog consumption, Indigenous Filipino scholars like Iö Mones Jularbal believe that a continued discernment of their indigenous animal practices in

¹⁷⁷ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 212.

¹⁷⁸ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," vol. 1, no. 1 (September 8, 2012): 7, <http://hdl.handle.net/1807/138516>.

view of developing animal welfare is “making amends between past and present.”¹⁷⁹ Jularbal notes that this is how the Igorot culture will flourish in response to the changing tides. The Igorot people, especially the younger generations, are discerning how to reconcile with the contemporary ethical landscape today while keeping their traditions.¹⁸⁰ Thus, this illustrates that a true revival of indigenous animal practices must foster respect for Indigenous communities’ ongoing discernment.

Building on this discernment, providing affectionate care modeled by Indigenous women is worth emulating. What it might mean for single women and companion animals is the ability to embrace nature, animals, and the bounty of the earth as part of their home. It entails celebrating single women who act as modern *babaylanes*. As the new *babaylanes*, they choose to resist patriarchal governance of their autonomy, choosing instead to care for animals and nature as a form of birthing life and co-creating a multispecies home. Similarly, animals must be liberated from the colonial and imperial grips that marginalize them. This is achieved by restoring intimacy with them, blurring the boundaries of shared space, and recovering our kinship with them—moving away from colonial, utilitarian, and capitalist principles. The song “Babaylan,” performed by Talahib, beautifully speaks to the resistance of *babaylanes* in the postcolonial Philippines, whose struggle is intertwined with nature.

Babaylan

Chorus

Nagbabangon ang mga babaylan

Sa mga bukid at pagawaan

Babaylan

Chorus

The babaylans are rising

In the fields and factories

¹⁷⁹ Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course,” 49.

¹⁸⁰ Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course,” 49.

Kinikitil ang sumpa ng nakaraan	The curse of the past is being broken
Nagbabangon ang mga babaylan	The babaylans are rising
Libong ulit na kayong pinatay	You have been killed a thousand times
Kay tagal nyo na ring nahimlay sa hukay	You have been lying in the pit for so long
Ngunit sa pakikidigma ng bayan	But in the people's war
Muling nagbabangon ang mga babaylan	The babaylans are rising again
Libong ulit ng lakas ng tinig	A thousand times stronger than the voice
Nagpupumiglas ang itinaling bisig	The tied arm is struggling
At sa bawat babaeng nais lumaya	And for every woman who wants to be free
Nagbabangong ang mga babaylan	The babaylans are rising

Conclusion

This chapter asserts that the marginalization of both single women and companion animals was influenced by the Spanish and American colonization. The marginalization of single women is rooted in the ideology of marriage and family. The colonial expansion of Christianity destroyed the empowered image of women symbolized by the *babaylan*. During the American occupation, the positionality of single women did not improve as they were confined to their domestic roles despite being encouraged to attain educational and career advancement. The imperial government facilitated the exploitation of women by American men, who abandoned them and their children and subjected them to racial prejudice.

Animals, simultaneously, were commodified and colonized through the colonizers' new market system, technological advancements, and benevolent assimilation projects of urbanization and sanitation. Indeed, animals were further marginalized in the way that they became a metaphor for the savagery of Filipino Indigenous people. They were also demonized, gazed at maliciously, and killed to appease the colonizers. This systemic treatment of animals was contradictory to how the Indigenous inhabitants shared space with them, entangled in a complex and nuanced relationship.

With postcolonial ecofeminism, it is understood that the oppression of single women and companion animals is a shared fate perpetuated by patriarchal and colonial structures that dishonored and continue to dishonor the existence of both. This perspective calls for the retrieval of meaningful indigenous practices that will alleviate the suffering of both women and animals, and benefit the whole cosmos. These indigenous practices must be discerned with respect for Indigenous communities' continued cultural reflection and self-determination.

This chapter has contextualized the lived experiences of both, vital for the next chapter—the data analysis. It can contour the narratives of the participating single women. Simultaneously, it asks about how indigenous practices of relating to animals are continued and sustained by single women in their ministry of care for their companion animals. Identifying such indigenous practices is a rich site for exploring how human-animal companionship in the Philippines can be a decolonizing ministry praxis that stimulates ecological conversion.

Chapter 6

Narratives of Kinship from Multispecies Homes

*You are a cat, yes,
And I worry about your pain before me, with me, and without me.
So excuse the fuss I shower you with, even when you tell (scratch!) me to let you be.¹ —
Francine*

When I experienced [the] first death of my dog... that's my core memory... Then, she got poisoned. So I was just eating, then [she] was convulsively shaking. Then, after five minutes, she had passed... That's a core memory that I couldn't forget. [Their death] is my greatest fear. But on a happy side, my other core memory is when I got them... I'm proud of them, they fought for their lives.² —Kaye

Introduction

The previous chapters have provided literature and foundational theoretical underpinnings to support the claims of this thesis-project. The concept of *Laudato Si*'s ecological conversion—the central framework of this work—aims to call people to a renewal of their relationships with creation. To this end, this chapter fleshes out how ecological conversion is at work in the lives of single women and their companion animals.

Again, this work puts forward two critical assertions. First, the care work of Filipino single women for their companion animals is a form of ministry praxis that “excludes

¹ Francine, interview by author, Zoom, April 1, 2026. This is an excerpt of the poem Francine wrote about her cat when she suddenly looked into the cat's eyes. Such sensorial encounter led her to put in writing her feelings about her, particularly imagining how her cat had survived a cruel world prior to her arrival in her life. A copy of the poem was sent to me via email. Francine approved it to be included in this thesis-project as a supplemental document. The poem is attached as one of the appendices.

² Kaye, interview by author, Zoom, January 31, 2026. In this quote, Kaye describes her core memories about her dogs. She describes caring for her dogs as a paradox of death and life, and fear and triumph.

nothing and no one,”³ by being in solidarity with animals. Second, as a reciprocal relationship, the companion animals under their care transform them spiritually and environmentally. This ministry praxis, however, is shaped by the intertwining marginalization of both entrenched in the patriarchal, anthropocentric, colonial, and imperial logics of domination.

Through phenomenological interviews with ten (10) Filipino single women (never married, no children), ages 26-60, based in the Philippines, the phenomenon of the reciprocal relationship between single women and companion animals was investigated. The whole process of data gathering was informed by ecofeminism/postcolonial ecofeminism and feminist standpoint epistemology. The thoughts of Ivone Gebara, Agnes Brazal, Jeane Peracullo, and Kwok Pui-lan were influential in building a theoretical context for the lived experiences of participating single women and their companion animals. On the other hand, feminist standpoint epistemology honored the epistemic privilege of both single women and their companion animals. The participants not only spoke about their personal narratives but also about those of their companion animals, amplifying their voices.

Data revealed that the participants’ care for their companion animals goes beyond the anthropocentric image of ‘pet ownership’ that frames it as a hobby or preoccupation. It is a ministry praxis that attends to the needs of their companion animals—a calling to care and advocate for them against different forms of marginalization. Moreover, the multispecies homes of single women and companion animals are a means for claiming the concepts of family and home traditionally associated with marriage and family. Such a relationship

³ Francis, *Laudato Si’* [Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home], The Holy See, June 18, 2015, sec. 92, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

crosses species and family structure boundaries. Care becomes a co-constitutive expression of kinship between single women and companion animals. Moreover, care in this fellowship has political and social implications. It is an exercise of power against patriarchal, colonial, imperial, and anthropocentric structures.

It was also revealed that the participants are enriched spiritually and environmentally. They experience a heightened connection with God, others, and creation by becoming more prayerful, more perceptive of God's presence in their lives, and more accepting of others. They have developed their empathy for animals, are more drawn to nature, are more aware of the intimate relatedness of everything, and are more motivated to educate others about animal welfare. What is affirmative is that this ministry praxis does not only reside within the homes, but it goes out through personal advocacy for animal welfare education, rescuing animals, and the shaping of future activism.

Guiding Frameworks

The data gathering was informed by several theoretical principles, which I discussed at the beginning of this thesis-project. First, it advances an ecofeminist and postcolonial ecofeminist lens that analyzes the simultaneous marginalization of women and animals. Ivone Gebara's concept of "relatedness" proposes that their marginalization is a product of intersecting institutional and structural patriarchal, imperial, and anthropocentric forms of domination.⁴ The oppression of women is intimately connected to the oppression of nonhuman beings. It denotes that our existence is not in isolation but is always related and intertwined with creation, shaped by realities that impose power and control.

⁴ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Fortress Press, 1999), 92.

From a postcolonial stance, Agnes Brazal argues that *Laudato Si'* is not critical of the care burden delegated to women. Brazal is concerned about *Laudato Si'*'s absence of gender analysis that pays attention to how women in patriarchal societies are heavily burdened by care work.⁵ This thesis-project extends women's care to animals. On this note, while I object to the unequal division of labor, which disproportionately impacts women, their work can be seen as a model for caring for animals. The participating women acknowledge the importance of caring for companion animals as a form of kinship. Thus, their work is agentic and liberatory.

According to Kwok Pui-lan, postcolonial ideals have significantly ruptured women's relationship with themselves and nature. Marriage has restricted women's autonomy and agency. Capitalism has altered their relationship with nature.⁶ Philippine society's overemphasis on marriage—mostly seen as a norm and not a choice—has become the measure of women's worth. On the other hand, capitalism and economic inequalities are seen as a source of struggles for both women and animals. The narratives of participating single women revealed how these complex postcolonial realities have shaped their kinship. Their daily care becomes a statement of resistance to postcolonial realities that marginalize both women and companion animals.

Jeane Peracullo's framework *kumakalam na sikmura* (gnawing of the stomach) identifies hunger as Filipino women's environmental struggle. It is a metaphor for how Filipino women are on the receiving end of the critical environmental problems posed by

⁵ Agnes M. Brazal, "Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si'*: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (May 2021): 22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000614>.

⁶ Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 212.

global and local inequalities.⁷ This moral framework speaks deeply about how women and stray animals in the Philippines are caught in temporal vulnerabilities due to poverty exacerbated by colonial and imperial forces.

This study considers the voice of single women as an epistemic privilege, as they possess unique insights into their marginalization proposed by feminist standpoint epistemology.⁸ Their narratives convey reflections on their lived experiences and their relationships with their companion animals, shaped by society through cultural, political, and economic structures. In resonance with the lived experiences of participating single women, their storytelling in the interviews became a platform for the animal voice of their companion animals. Animal voice refers to the communication of animals to express their non-verbal communication (gestures, vocalization, gaze, etc.), personalities, interests, needs, and experiences in the context of the shared bond of humans and animals.⁹ Josephine Donovan believes in the potential of feminist standpoint epistemology to echo animal subjectivities with the help of human agents.¹⁰ I would like to put so much caution here that animals have their own voice, but the storytelling of the participating single women in this study became a vehicle to deliver animal voice to a larger audience. Therefore, aside from the single women who participated, companion animals and other animals served as interlocutors for this

⁷ Jeane C. Peracullo, “Kumakalam na Sikmura: Hunger as Filipino Women’s Awakening to Ecofeminist Consciousness,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 31, no. 2 (2015): 35-37, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.31.2.25>.

⁸ Abigail Brooks, “Feminist Standpoint Epistemology: Building Knowledge and Empowerment Through Women’s Lived Experience,” in *SAGE Publications, Inc. eBooks*, 2007, 63–65, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984270.n3>.

⁹ Anja M. Thomsen et al., “Listen to Us: Perceptions of Animal Voice and Agency,” *Animals* 13, no. 20 (October 19, 2023): 3, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13203271>.

¹⁰ Josephine Donovan, “Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue,” *Signs* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 320, <https://doi.org/10.1086/491750>.

humble study. Furthermore, critical anthropomorphism is an important ethical framework to justify that we can speak about animals on the condition that we do not impose on them human-based standards and assumptions and retain their animal nature.¹¹ While the narratives of the participants about their companion animals were acknowledged for their substantial contribution, I uphold that animal voice remains indispensable. In line with Donovan's view of human agents echoing animal subjectivities, interview responses that exhibit anthropomorphic perspectives were neither judged nor removed as these are vital sites for continued examination of human-animal relations.

Subjectivities that Emerged

Forming the Relationship

A. "I Choose You": Agentic Choice of Companion Animals

As the participants recalled the backstory of their first meetings with their companion animals, they highlighted how the animals chose to be with them. Three participants believe that their companion animals ended up with them because the animals made the choice themselves. Francine shared how her cat jumped into her lap at a laundromat upon seeing her. She believes that the cat jumping into her lap was a deliberate choice despite the fact that she used to be scared of cats. Leading up to their encounter, she had experienced an extraordinary moment of being surrounded by several cats the night before. It was something that had never happened to her as a non-cat person. In hindsight, she interpreted it as a foreshadowing of the arrival of her cat. In the poem she wrote about her cat, which she recited during the interview, she speaks about her cat choosing her:

¹¹ Fredrik Karlsson, "Critical Anthropomorphism and Animal Ethics," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 25, no. 5 (October 6, 2011): 707–20, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-011-9349-8>.

You are a cat, yes,
And you chose me to be your human.
I hope you always will,
Even through failing health and memory,
Either yours or mine, my heart you'll fill.

You are a cat, yes,
But I haven't known anyone or anything
Choose me like you did and often do.
So excuse my grateful heart and the
Mothering I tend to do.¹²

Another participant views her belonging with her rescue dogs as the dogs' choice. Kaye has 10 dogs: 4 of them are rescues, 1 was adopted, and the rest are offspring of the other dogs. Her rescue dogs are survivors of human abuse. One dog was run over by a vehicle. Another dog endured physical abuse. The third one was found dragging her chain. And the fourth suffered from Canine Transmissible Venereal Tumor (CTVT), which Kaye treated for several months. For Kaye, being approached by her rescue dogs was not an arbitrary event. She said that her dogs made a choice based on their instincts that told them that she was kind. She said:

[Dog's name] was just crying at my house. It seemed like he just saw me feeding the other dogs like [dog's name], my first dog. That's when he felt that I was a good person. Same as [dog's name] and [dog's name]. They were just wandering around, [and] then they just came to my house [to get fed]. They adopted me. They chose their momma. They chose [me] using their instincts. If you are a bad person, they will not approach you. Souls got connected through their eyes.¹³

It was as if Kaye was welcomed into the fold when she mentioned that the dogs "adopted" her. For her, their coming together was an affirmation of them connecting through the soul. The dogs' instincts led them to her doorstep, but the "soul connection" was the one

¹² Francine, interview. This is a continuation of the poem in the epigraph.

¹³ Kaye, interview.

that confirmed their belonging to each other. Kaye's statement, "they adopted me," connotes a reversal of roles. Humans are typically seen as the primary providers of care to animals. In Kaye's case, the opposite seems true. While she spoke about the many ways she provides for and loves her dogs, she also noted the ways they care for her—one of which is being provided protection, as she stated, "they always protect me since I [am] living alone."¹⁴ Their presence in her life is a source of protection and company as a single woman living independently, which may pose a danger. Having them beside her somehow gives her assurance of safety.

Inka shared that a male stray dog with a back injury entered their home, went straight to their other dog's bowl, and lay in the bed of the dog who had recently passed away. She shared, "Actually, he chose our home,"¹⁵ emphasizing that the dog made a choice to be with them. At that time, the family was still grieving the loss of their other dog. Before formally adopting the injured dog, Inka's sister would feed him until they decided to take him in.

These insights from the participants reveal how they recognize the agentic acts of their companion animals by virtue of being chosen. Animal agency is a combination of will, rationality, and intentionality of animals to achieve their interests and fulfill their needs within their environment and contexts.¹⁶ Moreover, their choice refers to selecting their preference among the available options.¹⁷ Animals have been positioned as passive beings who cannot communicate and make choices. But the experiences of the participants

¹⁴ Kaye, interview.

¹⁵ Inka, interview by author, Zoom, December 4, 2025.

¹⁶ Heather Browning and Walter Veit, "Animal Welfare, Agency, and Animal–Computer Interaction," *Animals* 15, no. 2 (January 15, 2025): 1, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani15020219>.

¹⁷ Browning and Veit, "Animal Welfare, Agency, and Animal–Computer Interaction," 1.

demonstrate how their companion animals advocated for themselves amidst the abuse they had previously endured before finding safety. Moreover, the agentic acts shared by the participants were not simply the dogs selecting from food options, but rather, choosing certain human traits that aligned with their needs. Of all people, they were chosen for a reason. These insights shed light on the agency of animals in building relationships with humans.

The stories of the participants lead us to reflect that wanting to have companion animals may not be enough; the animals must choose you. It challenges the idea of “ownership” attached to companion animals, where humans decide the breed, age, color, and traits of the animals they take in. In fact, recently there has been a rise in AI videos where shelter dogs choose in the room the humans they want to adopt them. Because of the impact of these videos, Animal Care Centers of NYC (ACC) launched “Love At First Wag,” an adoption event where humans sat in the room and waited for the shelter dogs to approach them.¹⁸ The idea of being chosen by animals, for whatever reason they decided to choose us, reconstructs the power we attribute to them. This aligns with Donna Haraway’s framing, discussed in Chapter 4, that it is not only we who have companion animals, but that companion animals also “have” us.¹⁹

¹⁸ ACCNYC, “Love At First Wag” created February 16, 2026, YouTube video, 0:00-0:48, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/KvqMXkHoTlg>.

¹⁹ Haraway, “The Companion Species,” Donna J. Haraway, “The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness,” in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Scholarship Online, 2017), 145, <https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816650477.003.0002>.

B. “You are Welcome Here”: Single Women Chose to Respond

Several participants did not originally plan on having a companion animal for various reasons. For example, Inka initially did not feel ready to keep the injured dog that came into their house because she was still grieving the passing of their dog. And yet, the arrival of the dog seemed out of the ordinary; she recalled “whenever I talk about this [the encounter], I get goosebumps.”²⁰ It indicates that it was something beyond her. Inka vividly remembered that the day they adopted him was the time when Pope Francis visited the Philippines. They gave him a Pope Francis-inspired name on the Feast of the Holy Family. Naming her dog, one that has a religious meaning, is a symbolic ritual of embracing kinship. The dog is no longer homeless, a stranger, and a forgotten entity—but a named animal whose dignity has been acknowledged by being accepted as kin. This ritual of naming is an embodiment of what Arthur Walker-Jones asserts in Chapter 2 about the biblical practice of naming, which is honoring our kinship with animals.²¹

Francine perceived being chosen by her cat as extraordinary, especially since she used to be scared of cats. Despite not considering herself a cat person, she took the cat under her care. Even after taking the cat home, she did not immediately assume the cat was hers because it had a collar. She thought the cat belonged to someone. She did her due diligence looking for the owner on social media groups for cats, but to no avail; no one claimed the cat. Despite her lack of experience, she took on the responsibility with an open heart.

²⁰ Inka, interview.

²¹ Arthur Walker-Jones, “Naming the Human Animal: Genesis 1–3 and Other Animals in Human Becoming,” *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 52, no. 4 (2017): 1005–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12375>.

Although the dog was originally adopted to support Pamela's mental health, she did not immediately bond with the dog because of the added responsibility. She recalled, "I didn't like her because I had to feed her. It was hard. Eventually, we tried to cage her outside. Eventually, I learned to just let her come into my room... I just put up with it because he needs company."²² The burden of providing care was ultimately overcome by Pamela's realization that her dog needed companionship. She understood that the dog needed her, so she decided to accept the responsibility.

Similar to other participants, Tanya was hesitant to have a dog again due to the nature of her job as a member of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Her job involves unpredictable deployments. The passing of her previous dog while she was in training was another factor. However, a turn of events swayed her decision, which she perceived as "a sign from the Lord." When a retiring colleague approached her to adopt a puppy from a litter, she was moved by his love for his dog and his trust that she would take care of the puppy seriously. She specifically chose the puppy with extra toes, which she cited as traditionally believed to be *swerte* (lucky).

I saw that he loved his dog... he said he didn't want to give [the puppies] to someone he didn't know or didn't know if they would be taken care of properly, so he approached me... He would be at peace before he leaves [knowing] that he gave the puppy to someone he really knew... So I chose [puppy's name] among the little ones because of her feet. She has extra toes... and I'm just happy with her because what I had in mind at first was for her to... play with her or feed her, that was my intention... but she was like a pet all along... I have grown to love her because she sleeps beside me. I take her with me to work as long as she does not interrupt my duty.²³

She also shared that she did not prefer female dogs because of the likelihood of getting pregnant. But the puppy she chose was female. Tanya's choice of a female puppy

²² Pamela, interview by author, Zoom, November 3, 2025.

²³ Tanya, interview by author, Zoom, March 6, 2026.

with extra toes notably positions her choice as a counter-practice to the conventional ways animals are chosen by humans. Companion animals are preferred for their pedigree, performance, sex, and appearance. She looked past these and followed her heart. On another note, although she initially wanted to maintain her distance while still providing for the puppy's needs, she could not help but embrace the relationship and let it flourish. This became more evident when her puppy was integrated into her daily life.

C. Pondering Ministry in Woman-Animal Companionship

The experiences of Inka, Francine, Pamela, and Tanya illustrate various reasons for hesitating to take in companion animals. The weight of responsibility, fear, grief, and the nature of one's work can indeed be daunting circumstances that make one unwilling to extend love and care. Yet, these participants were moved to respond. They recognized the animals' need for someone to take care of them in their perilous situation. They understood that the responsibility now rested upon them. Moreover, the belief that the moment represented a larger calling—a special appointment or a “sign from God,” as cited by Tanya—served as a strong motivation to respond. This ministry praxis does not involve any type of formal training or commissioning suggested by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) cited in Chapter 1.²⁴ And yet, it was clear to the participants that it was a calling they had to discern, as it was a matter of life and death. Despite not going through any ritual of formalization or authorization, they were able to navigate the responsibility.

²⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 11-12.

Being chosen by companion animals and responding to them in return offers a compelling image of a ministry praxis. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, ministry from a Christian perspective is often understood as one-sided, formally designated, structured, and human-to-human contact. Ministry tends to be one-sided where the minister is perceived to be the giver. However, in this ministry praxis, both benefit from the relationship in so many ways. Patty attests to this when she described the immense love she receives from her dog despite her shortcomings.

She gives unconditional love even if she doesn't talk. Since I don't spend so much time with her...When I play with her, I spend five minutes when I get home from work. Of course, I'm already tired. Then, I don't get to walk her every day, and the things I do for her are limited. But her return of love is great. When she sees me, even from afar, she would jump.²⁵

This ministry praxis of these single women is organic, which naturally bloomed by overcoming personal obstacles, opening themselves to the calling, and sustaining their relationships. The realization of their mission was rooted in the needs of their companion animals. Although the responsibility was still heavy and their circumstances did not change, their active choice to provide care is a testament to their willingness to sacrifice for the welfare of their companion animals. This is in alignment with the stance of Paul Avis and the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* in Chapter 1 that ministry is “essential to the church’s life and mission”²⁶ and an act of doing good for the Kingdom of God by utilizing our gifts.²⁷ Adopting and rescuing animals, or simply choosing to care for companion animals ethically,

²⁵ Patty, interview by author, Zoom, October 4, 2025.

²⁶ Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 49, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁷ Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: ECCCE, 1997), sec. 1420.

is a form of restoring our relationship with them that fosters universal communion. *Laudato Si'* states that universal communion “excludes nothing and no one,”²⁸ which should translate in our ministry to enlarge our work in the Kingdom.

I argue, however, that ministering to animals is not a popularly known ministry praxis within the Church. Most ministries involve human-to human contact. In fact, hardly does the Church even realize that this homegrown practice is worthy of being considered as a ministry since “pet ownership” (in its anthropocentric form) is seen more as a preoccupation than an act of justice. Conversely, the relationships of the participants with their companion animals are far from this paradigm. Ministering to animals is *la-avod* (Gn 2:15) or a sacred duty that the participants accepted, utilizing their resources and gifts. Their ministry praxis has reordered their lives in a certain way to accommodate the needs of their companion animals. Toni, for example, opts to eat food that she can share with her dogs and cat. She would also take her dogs to the beach while enjoying herself. And she avoids travelling far where she cannot bring all of them. Their home blurs the human-animal divide. What she eats and where she goes are determined with consideration for the needs of the animals she cares for.

Challenging the Hierarchies and Colonial Forces

A. Defining and Navigating the Relationship

In human relationships, roles are defined in the same way that the participants defined their relationship with their respective companion animals. They consider their companion animals as family and have a parent-child relationship with them. However, Toni, Francine, and Pamela play different roles in the lives of their companion animals. Pamela said that she

²⁸ Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 92.

is an older sister to her dog; her mother is the primary caregiver. Francine, on the other hand, stressed that her cat is a companion and not a child, saying, “So it’s like I don’t treat her like a child, unlike others. She is more of a companion at home that you need to cook for and ensure that she has food.”²⁹ As her companion, she makes sure that her needs are met. Toni expressed that she is a guardian to her *alaga* (animals under her care)—to veer away from the pet-master relationship and underscore the obscuring of power imbalances. To her, the pet-master dynamic does not capture the realities of their relationship. Being a guardian means being their protector and shelter, while acknowledging that she learns with and from them.

So normally, people have a pet. So if you have a pet, you are the master, right? So if you are the animal, you are the human. I’m guiding them, and I’m learning with them, right? So there are things that I’m learning with them. More like I’m fostering their health and their well-being, so that’s how I feel it...Like I’m more of their shelter or their home...[They’re] like *alaga*. I’m taking care of them, so I feel like...more like their guardian...I’m not their parent. I never did birth them, right? And I’m not bigger than or higher than them...Like, I’m more their protector.³⁰

In our later conversation, she pointed out that an attachment centered on ownership can leave a person heartbroken and unwilling to care for other animals when their pet passes away. Thus, she contemplated that this kind of attachment can deter one’s potential to help other animals. This stance suggests that our definition of our relationship with companion animals can influence our ability to extend care to other animals. While adopting “blood-related” roles can forge a less distant relationship, it could also impede humans from cultivating a more inclusive relationship with other animals.

Defining the relationship involves assuming each other’s roles. The participants reported similar ways of interacting with their companion animals and meeting their basic

²⁹ Francine, interview.

³⁰ Toni, interview by author, Zoom, January 23, 2026.

needs. A large part of their responsibility is to secure food, veterinary care, a comfortable place to stay, and financial readiness for health emergencies. One finding that surfaced is that being single is an advantage in ensuring the welfare of their companion animals, as they have a stable income to cover daily costs. However, when their companion animals get sick, it can become very challenging. One participant's priority is to save funds for both her personal emergencies and those of her companion animals. For Jane, the dependence of companion animals on humans urges one to be an advocate for them. She asserted that "dogs cannot fend for themselves" as "they are so vulnerable."³¹ Thus, she believes humans should act as advocates for them. Being an advocate for companion animals is not a free pass to dominate them, but a privilege to care for them. Likewise, the participants did not leave the impression that their companion animals are a burden; instead, they embrace the responsibility from a place of love and reciprocity in return for the many benefits they experience from taking care of them.

Learning to communicate with each other is essential in nurturing the relationship. The participating women said that they have to comprehend the body language, gestures, and vocalizations of their companion animals. For instance, Patty learned through observation that when her dog dislikes food, she spits it out. It demands reading into her dog's gestures to know what her dog wants to convey. Patty explained that she respects her dog's boundaries, saying, "We have silent communication. If she spews out the food, it means [she doesn't like the food]. So it makes me attuned to her needs...I have to read into her gestures. I won't force her and say, 'Eat that!' Then, I will prepare her a new one."³²

³¹ Jane, interview.

³² Patty, interview by author, Zoom, October 4, 2025.

Toni respects and affirms the communication of her dogs. While others may be annoyed by the sound of a dog barking, Toni views this behavior in a positive light. For example, when she hears her dog bark, she says, “Thank you for protecting the house. Were you protecting the house?”³³ She affirms the behavior by recognizing that it is not meant to cause a disturbance, but is actually a sign of protection. She does not punish her dogs simply because she wants them to behave in a certain way. When a dog bites, she interprets it as a way to work on boundaries. She takes a reflexive stance by assuming that she may have overlooked being attentive to the animal’s communication. She noted, “For me, if the dog bites me, that means we can work on boundaries. Maybe I didn’t listen. Maybe there was a communication that was misunderstood.”³⁴ Rather than being reactive or blaming the dog, she exercises humility by acknowledging the gaps in her communication. This ethical practice of Toni concurs with Donna Haraway’s ‘disciplined spontaneity’ in Chapter 4, which adheres to mutual learning, mutual responsiveness, and obedience to each other—where both the human and the animal create a reciprocal learning space.³⁵

In Franciscan animal spirituality, humility and respect are two vital attitudes when engaging with animals. The practices of Patty and Toni are cognizant of the dignity of animals by respecting their natural behavior and not altering it. They see the difference in communication of their companion animals as a unique aspect of their animal nature. It is imperative in their respective relationships that hierarchies are intentionally muted. Moreover, their humility towards their companion animals is a manifestation of Dawn

³³ Toni, interview.

³⁴ Toni, interview.

³⁵ Haraway, “The Companion Species,” 154.

Nothwehr's Franciscan concept of obedience in Chapter 1. Obedience is necessary to authentically build a relationship with creation. Through obedience, we engage with animals from a place of humility, and not superiority.³⁶ Obedience in relating to animals signifies that we are open to learning from them and that we are not in any way better than them. Thus, their communication and traits are sites of wisdom we are willing to bask in.

B. Negotiating Space of Care

Space is governed by the boundaries that establish a divide between humans and animals. Some participants shared how they negotiate space for their companion animals. For instance, Tanya had to “unofficially” keep her dog in the barracks despite the strict rule of not permitting any dogs within their military compound. Because the higher authority discerned that stray dogs might be rabid or feral, stray dogs caught roaming within the perimeter were killed. Even though her dog was in the barracks, she would not allow her dog to follow her into the office—a place presumed to be not lenient for negotiating rules. Moreover, she mediated for the stray animals lurking around the perimeter by asking her colleagues to do their due diligence in inquiring about the dogs instead of killing them. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss how animal restrictions were eventually lifted due to Tanya's consistent advocacy for her dog.

Lea currently lives with her parents, who wanted her dogs caged because they had destroyed some things in the house. She was disheartened that they refused to let the dogs roam free. Because of this, she could not help but express her frustration, as caging or tying

³⁶ Dawn M. Nothwehr, “Benedictine Responsibility and Franciscan Mutuality: Perspectives on the Relationship Between Humans and the Environment,” in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Dawn M. Nothwehr (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002), 408.

up her dogs goes against her beliefs. She blurted out, “If you don’t like my pets, let’s just go our separate ways. I can manage to live in an apartment anyway.”³⁷ Eventually, her parents mellowed regarding their complaints about her dogs, and their relationship is now in a better place.³⁸

Anna lives with her mother, whom she describes as not liking animals. Her mother interprets the barking of her dog as a sign of being ‘spoiled.’ Anna, however, is aware that when her dog barks, it means that they are alerted to the presence of a person outside. What Anna sees as something natural to her dog is interpreted by her mother as misbehavior. Despite being hurt by her mother’s attitude toward her dog, she pacifies the situation by asking her dog to move away from the situation.

My mom, who lives with me, doesn't like pets in general. She doesn't like animals. So usually, I hear her say, I should really shout at the dog and all that. [She'd say] “You're spoiling the dog.” I actually just don't mind it. But what happens is that sometimes when she says mean words, I cry. But for me, when he barks...it's like a natural doorbell. So, of course, when he sees people outside the door. He will inform us that there's somebody outside the door. But, you know, Mom just interprets it as noise, or she would somehow say that it's embarrassing to the neighbors. She'd say “Shut up!” But it's something that I just have to manage, because I also live in my mom's house, so...I just tell [dog's name] to go away.

Tanya, Lea, and Anna negotiate the space of care in the workplace and in the household. Their manner of advocating for their dogs’ access to space may not be the same, but all of them wish to give freedom to their companion animals—the freedom to be themselves and to be with their humans. This negotiation of space is an ongoing rejection of anthropocentric and colonial views of animals regarding human-animal spatial proximity. The animal-related values of the family members of Lea and Anna are coherent with the

³⁷ Lea, interview by author, Zoom, April 10, 2026.

³⁸ Anna, interview by author, Zoom, January 8, 2026.

analysis of Nicolo Paolo Ludovice³⁹ and Yamini Narayanan⁴⁰ in Chapter 5 regarding the imperial and colonial scheme of pushing stray animals away to maintain an organized and aesthetically pleasing urban space. Stray animals are consistently depicted as a nuisance, a threat, or a sign of “informality.”⁴¹ The only difference is that this exclusion exists in the household, where the intimacies of care are supposed to flourish more. The approaches of Lea and Anna may be contrasting, but both intend the best for their respective companion animals—whether through an explicit protest or a quiet resistance. Weaponizing the natural responses of dogs against them is both anthropocentric and colonial in nature. In my conversation with Inka, she described how the Spaniards widened the gap in our relationship with animals. She explicated, “Dogs are family members. In fact, people had ceremonial burials for them. But when the Spaniards came, our perception of cats and dogs changed.”⁴²

The militaristic and patriarchal method of managing stray animals in Tanya’s workplace constructs stray animals as disposable and unworthy of compassion. While the primary justification was health-related, the restrictions were designed to decide whose survival was more important. This approach aligns with Tijana Vujosevic’s concept of akinship—the betrayal of human-animal kinship through the systemic subjugation of animals to maintain human dominance and achieve human interests.⁴³ This hierarchy dictates that the

³⁹ Nicolo Paolo P. Ludovice, “Domesticated Geographies: Animals and the Making of Modern Health in the Philippines, 1860-1935” (PhD diss., University of Hong Kong, 2021), 353.

⁴⁰ Yamini Narayanan, “Street Dogs at the Intersection of Colonialism and Informality: ‘Subaltern Animism’ as a Posthuman Critique of Indian Cities,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35, no. 3 (2017): 481, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816672860>.

⁴¹ Narayanan, “Street Dogs,” 481.

⁴² Inka, interview.

⁴³ Tijana Vujosevic, “Homage to the Sad Space Bitch: Laika–Belka–Strelka,” *Thresholds* 48 (April 1, 2020): 155, https://doi.org/10.1162/thld_a_00718.

interests of humans are superior to the survival of stray animals. Similarly, the tragic fate of Laika—the Soviet dog discussed in Chapter 1—sustained the primacy of the human agenda at the expense of a stray dog. Ultimately, crossing borders and boundaries is a privilege given to humans but denied to animals. However, when crossing borders is dangerous for humans, implicating vulnerable species becomes the “solution” in the guise of heroism. Stray animals become easy targets because no one claims them. Thus, Tanya’s bold act symbolizes a disposition that rejects this type of akinship.

Society Questioning the Relationship

In Chapter 5, I outlined the systemic marginalization against Filipino single women that is often quiet, unnoticeable, and seemingly justified. I also highlighted that age is a significant intersectional identity that facilitates a distinct experience for them. Responsibility to companion animals is thought to compete with obligations to humans. The binding of single women and companion animals is not always appreciated and celebrated in Filipino culture, whereas the idea of marriage and family is. The participants surfaced these realities when we focused on the question about society’s reaction to their relationship with their companion animals.

Generally, the participants reported receiving positive reactions to their relationship with their companion animals. They said that their colleagues and friends are aware of their dedication to their companion animals, often referring to them as “kind” and “animal lovers.” While the accounts of the participants are generally positive, some participants aged 26-30 have received subtle questions, usually in a joking manner, about their single status and special bond with their animal companions. This means that their age group, among other

single participants, is the most vulnerable to marginalization through pressure to settle down and scrutiny regarding their companion animals.

Tanya's colleagues assume that maybe the reason why she is still single is her "desire for marriage has been transferred onto animals,"⁴⁴ especially when she would have a video call with her dog while deployed somewhere else. She replied that marriage is not her priority, to which they responded, "How's that? You wouldn't experience falling in love."⁴⁵ Interestingly, the comments of her colleagues communicate that love can only arise from a human-to-human relationship and caring for companion animals distracts people from being in a committed relationship.

Although she could not recall receiving remarks about her single status, Inka hinted that people often assume prioritizing companion animals automatically deprives humans of care. Inka supposes that it is as if she must choose between her dogs and the people under her care because, as she relayed, for other people, animals are "just a preoccupation, as if you're choosing between a human being and an animal... [when you care for an animal] everything else is unimportant."⁴⁶ Care has been traditionally associated with humans⁴⁷ because of the hierarchical and anthropocentric view of animals. Moreover, concurrent with literature on Filipino women in Chapter 5, care work is relegated to women, particularly to single women in the family who are assumed to be more available to extend care (both to adults and

⁴⁴ Tanya, interview.

⁴⁵ Tanya, interview.

⁴⁶ Inka, interview.

⁴⁷ Agnes M. Brazal, "Ethics of Care in *Laudato Si'*: A Postcolonial Ecofeminist Critique," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 3 (May 2021): 222, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350211000614>.

children) because they do not have a family of their own.⁴⁸ On this note, Inka took on the responsibility of raising her sister's children following the passing of her sister.

When we talked about unconditional love provided by animals, Toni described a stark comparison between animals and men: "Because now, it's not a boyfriend that we want. We want someone to step up...We have our guardians [animals]...and they are committed to us...Do you ever see Pancake how she sees you when you come into the room? It's like you're the only one."⁴⁹ Toni challenges the concept of a romantic relationship with a man, which she stresses is not on par with the commitment and loyalty of animals.

Kaye was taken aback by an Austrian client who suggested that the reason for her being single is that a man must have hurt her. She replied by uttering, "Is that how you really see me? Like having those ten dogs, maybe partly yes, because it is humans who mindlessly hurt others." Her reply implies that it is better to give one's love to dogs than to men, as dogs are more capable of pure love. Kaye noted that her client's remark stemmed from the lens of a Western man who expects Filipino women to marry early. Because Kaye is based on a popular island flocked by foreign tourists, she deduced, "That's how foreigners see us,"⁵⁰ implying a stereotypical depiction of women from the Global South. Kaye's social reality runs parallel with the analysis in Chapter 5 regarding the interwoven marginalization of single women and animals using the ecofeminist framework of *kumakalam na sikmura* (gnawing of the stomach) by Jeane Peracullo. In the context of the island "paradise" image of the tourist destination where Kaye lives, there lies a glaring disparity between the lived

⁴⁸ Excelsa C. Tongson, "In Search of Filipino 'Women in the Middle,'" *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 26, no. 4 (November 30, 2020): 478-479, <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2020.1847865>.

⁴⁹ Toni, interview.

⁵⁰ Kaye, interview.

experiences of the foreign tourists and the locals. Local women are pervasively weakened by hunger as a visceral experience of the exploitation of natural resources to advance the tourism agenda, which is exacerbated by an imperial motif of the economy. As a result, the locals altogether can barely keep up with the rising prices of basic commodities and the privatization of many parts of the island. Local women, in the hopes of alleviating their economic status, aspire to marry a foreign man to have a better chance at life. Kaye's client gazes at her and other women on the island through a colonial lens. Likely, this man would not make the same comments to women in his home country. Ultimately, this reveals a colonial and imperial logic tracing back to the colonizers who systematically exploited Filipino women and nature through pervasive resource extraction. This created an image of Filipino women who are depleted by hunger, needing a man to save them—an image now gazed upon with condescension by foreign men.

Consistent with the literature in Chapter 5, Filipino single women are subjected to social expectations regarding finding a husband and having children. This is rooted in the colonial ideology of marriage and family introduced by the colonizers, which puts pressure on single women to prioritize human needs while relegating animals to the status of a “preoccupation.” Foreign men often view Filipino single women through a prism of poverty and low literacy; thus, marriage is framed as either an escape from or a byproduct of poverty. All these intersecting colonial, patriarchal, and imperial logics reduce women to mere bodies for reproduction and servitude. The perplexing reality of this depiction of Filipino single women is that it is expressed in subtle and sometimes humorous ways—despite its rootedness in these wicked systemic infrastructures. However, single women resist these

logics of domination by elevating the status of animals in their priorities, expressions of care, and co-creation of a multispecies home.

Companion Animals Keep Humans in Touch with Spirituality

The definition that I have rendered for spirituality in this thesis-project is “a way of life directed toward deepening and transcending meaning by cultivating well-rounded relationships with the self, God, fellow beings, and the whole creation.” Spirituality, in this study, refrains from being restrictive by describing itself in more inclusive and embracing terms. This definition posits that spirituality is grounded in the life we live in relation to all beings. Indeed, this definition reverberates with the principle of integral ecology in *Laudato Si’*—or the interdependence of all beings and realities. This relatedness is “woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”⁵¹ Indeed, the insights of the participants ponder spirituality, revealing how their companion animals act as a catalyst to enhance their relationship with God, others, and creation. While prayer and meditation were cited as ways through which they connect with God or other spiritual realms, spirituality also materializes through ordinary and secular activities where their companion animals serve as facilitators. The concept of God surfaced in the following ways: (1) God as the sustainer and source of care; (2) God’s love and presence are made visible by their companion animals; and (3) God is the source of creation, including their companion animals.

In attending to their respective dogs, prayer has become a source of providential care for both Tanya and Kaye. Tanya shared that since getting her dog, she has become more

⁵¹ Francis, *Laudato Si’*, sec. 92.

prayerful. Whenever she is assigned out-of-town duty, she prays for a safe journey and an immediate return home. In this regard, Tanya places her trust in God for things beyond her control so that she may return to be with her dog.

Despite having a stable job, it was apparent that caring for 10 dogs could be financially draining for Kaye. When she had her dog treated for CTVT, the cost of the chemotherapy was enormous. She spent around P50,000 (\$810) on the treatment. Prayer becomes their source of providential care to cover these financial costs. Moreover, she said that she and her dogs pray together for the dogs' basic needs and good health.

They are my spirit guides. And we pray together. We pray for their good health, and continued abundance. So we can still continue to [buy] their NexGard (tick and flea prevention) and their good health.⁵²

She remarked that her dogs are her 'spirit guides' who keep her grateful, happy, and grounded.

[As spirit guides], dogs are teaching us to be happy about simple things. They are happy with simple food...[They teach us to] be loving, affectionate, to be grateful, grounded, and pause to lie and rest. We are all busy hustling, working for money. They taught me how to pause in life.⁵³

Prayer becomes an encounter for them with the divine. This is affirmative of Susan Crane's claim about Saint Francis worshipping God with animals, cited in Chapter 3.⁵⁴ Saint Francis delivered a sermon to birds and encouraged them to praise God for providing care for them. Kaye has entered this space of oneness with her dogs in worship. Moreover, seeing animals as 'spirit guides' shares similarities with the indigenous practices of Filipinos, which

⁵² Kaye, interview.

⁵³ Kaye, interview.

⁵⁴ Susan Crane, "Francis of Assisi on Protecting, Obeying, and Worshipping with Animals," *Exemplaria* 33, no. 4 (2021): 369–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10412573.2021.1997023>.

honor the wisdom of animals as spiritual teachers. Her dogs illuminate her approach to life, offering perspectives that keep her attuned to the most fundamental things in the world.

For Anna, her relationship with her dog mirrors her relationship with God. When discussing this, she recalled a vivid memory of a special encounter that perfectly depicts this divine connection. Even during guided meditations involving God, her imagination uses the image of her dog as an accessible tool. When she said that God talks to her through her dog, she uttered, “I don’t romanticize it. When it does [happen], I accept it.” For her, this spiritual occurrence is not contrived or forced. It is something that her imagination naturally clings to. As it takes place, she welcomes it without judgment. In this context, she allows her dog’s intimacy with her to shape her spiritual sensibilities to have a better understanding of God. Her relationship with God becomes more embodied, palpable, and accessible with the aid of her relationship with her dog.

There are moments I would feel God talk to me through him. I usually sleep on the floor, and he would just go beside me. He crawled where my arm was. For me that was a moment of consolation that God is telling me...[When my dog] laid his head on my arm, it was like me in God’s arm. It was very gentle...My relationship with [dog’s name] is similar to my relationship with God. Sometimes, when I would go on a recollection or a retreat, when the facilitator says, “Imagine God...” I would remember how I would talk to [dog’s name] asking, “Who’s my *lab lab*?” (Whom do I love?). God’s probably doing it too me too. God talks to my pet companion. I don’t romanticize it. When it does [happen], I accept it.⁵⁵

Anna’s reflexive stance on her dog’s representation of God challenges how anthropomorphism is weighed. When we look at the animal metaphors and symbolism in the Bible, we find a wealth of representation of God using these devices. Now, it is good to ask whether these devices dispossess animals of their essence or nature as we personify God through them. Furthermore, it is helpful to consider how feminist scholars suggest a balanced

⁵⁵ Anna, interview.

position on this. In Chapter 2, I noted that Carol Adams expands our imaginative moral particularities by asking, “What if trying to have a conversation with an animal is like trying to have a conversation with God? Would we then bring a discipline of attending to our relationships with animals?”⁵⁶ These questions resound with how Anna imagines God through her dog. Indeed, imagining God in the position of the animal is impactful. My point, then, is that an ethics of care must be maintained in our relationship with animals by respecting their nature. However, there may be some instances when it is vital for us to use animal images and metaphors to drive powerful messages without altering animal characteristics. This affirms that animals are part of our spiritual realm. We cannot talk about the wonders of creation without having God and animals in the same line of thought. Spirituality is not static; it requires us to incorporate our senses and ingenious methods. It is flexible, creative, and sensorial. The narrative of Anna proves that this aspect of spirituality can be facilitated by companion animals.

When asked about spirituality, Jane described her dogs in connection with God’s purposive creative work. She reflects that only a powerful God could create companion animals like dogs. She believes that she has been entrusted with the responsibility to take care of them as God’s creation. Jane emphasized:

They say we’re stewards of God’s creation. They are God’s creation. I think so. Only a powerful being could create such a perfect human companion. I also think they are there for a reason, maybe for us to appreciate the Lord. Everything that we have comes from God. I’m blessed with this creation that I should take care of them. That’s how I honor the Lord. They come from God.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 192.

⁵⁷ Jane, interview by author, Zoom, September 27, 2025.

Jane's words are an affirmation that her dogs are not simply animals but are God's creation. Caring for them is honoring God. This spiritual framing of her dogs and her role as their human reveals a profound understanding of her relationship with them. Having her dogs under her care makes her accountable not only to them, but also to God.

Some participants shared how their relationships with other people have grown through their companion animals. This means either that they have developed positive attitudes to accept or understand others, or they have been led to reinforce existing relationships. Toni described this phenomenon, explaining that caring for animals has become a way for her to understand people and accept their differences. When she talked to friends with different social locations, she realized that they differed in animal care practices. Instead of looking at this reality from a place of judgment, she noted that it actually led her to understand not only her friends, but humans altogether:

I have friends who are transgender. I have friends who are Muslim, and I have friends who [have] different backgrounds, right? And it depends on how they grew up. So sometimes they would be grossed out with the idea of sleeping with your pet, right, or, in my case, how I take care of [dog's name], [dog's name], [cat's name], right? So what ended up happening is we had full-on discussions about what it is for them...either they were exposed [to animals] or not. And for me, [it] is a different level of human connection, so they helped me understand humans better.⁵⁸

This realization of Toni does not only speak about differences in animal care practices *per se*, but animal care practices are also indicative of diversity in socio-cultural backgrounds and upbringing. What her narrative illustrates is that companion animals are not simply a conversation starter or filler but a subject for examining our positionalities. Such can lead to a better understanding of others. This finding challenges the idea that our relationships with animals cannot bridge our relationships with humans—an idea implied by

⁵⁸ Toni, interview.

the response of Kalookan Bishop Pablo Virgilio “Ambo” David to the critiques of netizens regarding the incorporation of a dove in the *Salubong*, noted in Chapter 5. While it is true that “compassion should not be selective,” as he put it, his subsequent statement “then all the more should we be moved...by the suffering and destruction of human lives” hints that humans are still on a higher hierarchical rung of value than animals.⁵⁹

Patty, on the other hand, has developed new ways of relating to her friends by having a dog. Before having a dog, she could hardly understand her friends’ intense fascination with their dogs. Now that she has one, not only is she being checked in with by her friends, but also her dog. This suggests that companion animals are considered an extension of their humans, and their welfare is as important. Patty, then, was invited to join a group chat created by her friends. The group chat functions as a support group. Literature supports that companion animals help humans enhance social interactions as they act as “social lubricants.”⁶⁰ The group chat not only serves as a space for discussing dog-related concerns but has evolved into a space for spiritual support, as prayers for dogs are requested. With a common goal of caring for their dogs, a sense of community is formed. Patty explained her experience of having a dog:

My friends know her. Sometimes they even ask, “How is [dog’s name]?” Then, sometimes they will give a toy or something else...Before having a dog, I couldn’t understand why they were crazy about their dogs. They would post about their dogs. It was funny that they invited us to join the GC called *Barkadogs*. So it’s funny that we’re part of that GC. When one dog celebrates a birthday...all of them send greetings. It’s like a person. Funny, because recently...[one member] requested a prayer [for her dog].⁶¹

⁵⁹ Pablo Virgilio David, “SALUBONG,” Facebook, April 7, 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1KFWRDeYZ8/>.

⁶⁰ Phil Arkow, “The Impact of Companion Animals on Social Capital and Community Violence: Setting Research, Policy and Program Agendas,” *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 40, no. 4 (2013): 37, <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3760&context=jssw>.

⁶¹ Patty, interview.

Aside from the social integration that Patty has experienced, she was amazed at the idea of a group chat dedicated to dogs, exclaiming that dogs are “like a person.” Her amusement about treating dogs like persons—who have a dedicated group, are celebrated, and prayed for—is supported by the concept of personhood extended to animals, explained in Chapter 2. The reasons are that they are “a someone, not a something”⁶² for being sentient, they possess “a life that interacts and informs another’s,”⁶³ and they “share practical wisdom and knowledge.”⁶⁴ However, as I argued in my analysis of the case of a dove implicated in a ritual celebration in the Diocese of Kalookan, companion animals or pets tend to easily earn this special treatment or empathy. Samantha Hurn opines that pets are considered humans because they possess person-like traits, sometimes even dressed in clothing.⁶⁵ Non-traditional companion animals or animals in general are likely to be excluded from this recognition because they do not have the ‘human charisma.’⁶⁶ Hurn remarks that this is rooted in Western thought that “to be a person is to be human.”⁶⁷ Therefore, our resistance to honoring the personhood of animals is not only anthropocentric, hierarchical, and dualist. It is also colonial, one that negates Filipino indigenous ways of engaging with animals. In the previous chapter, I outlined the ways animals were part of the meaning-making and worldview of the

⁶² Joan Dunayer, “On Speciesist Language,” *On The Issues Magazine*, February 28, 1990, 2, <http://www.farinc.org/pdfs/Dunayer%201990.pdf>.

⁶³ Adams, *Neither Man nor Beast*, 39.

⁶⁴ Walker-Jones, “Naming the Human Animal,” 1025.

⁶⁵ Samantha Hurn, “Pets,” in *Humans and Other Animals: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Human-Animal Interactions*, 1st ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2012), 108, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt183p341.11>.

⁶⁶ I define ‘human charisma’ as the physical appearance and behaviors in companion animals that people associate with human-like qualities. For example, a puppy stare is likened to the way humans gaze.

⁶⁷ Hurn, “Pets,” 108.

people. They were part of their ritual—believed to possess a soul and capable of communicating with their departed ones. They collapsed the boundaries between humans and animals in terms of space, spirituality, and affinity. Thus, when we affirm the personhood of our companion animals and other animals, we preserve our rich culture and heritage and decolonize our view of animals. Decolonizing our view of animals, therefore, is a prerequisite for spiritual maturity. A decolonized approach to animals can cultivate authentic and horizontal kinship with them.

The relationships of Tanya, Kaye, Anna, Toni, and Patty with their companion animals facilitate pathways for spiritual growth. By praying for and with companion animals, utilizing animal interactions to tap into imaginative contemplations of God’s love, discussing animals to better understand social locations, and extending personhood to animals, they nourish their relationships with God, others, and creation. As these relationships are nurtured, the participants’ sense of self becomes more whole and integrated with the outside world. While these practices may seem mundane, they offer compelling ways to cultivate spiritual grounding and presence. In their examples, spirituality appears effortless, natural, and accessible.

Embracing Creation

A. Growing in Empathy for Animals Toward Conversion

The participants spoke about their experiences of being drawn to creation through their embodied and sensorial knowing of their companion animals. In their immediate relationship with companion animals, they gain knowledge about their personalities,

preferences, and needs. This embodied knowledge translates to growing in empathy for other animals.

Despite growing up surrounded by dogs, Lea had not felt as connected with them until she started caring for her own. Before that, unless she was told to feed the dog, she would not do anything extra for them since she was not directly responsible for them. Although she would see the dogs at home, there was no significant bond shared with them. Lea described her earlier dynamic with their family dogs:

I wasn't really into dogs before. I mean, we've always had dogs growing up... Because I was not the one in charge of them... So, like, Daddy will say, "feed the dog," but if they don't tell me that, I won't feed the dog. Because I know that Daddy is the one who will feed them. I don't pay much attention to them... So it's like we don't have a close relationship. They know I'm part of the family, but I don't have any interaction [with them].⁶⁸

Lea is currently the primary caregiver to two dogs. One dog came from her dad, and the other from her sister, who migrated to London. Now that she looks after them closely, her closeness to dogs has improved. She discussed that this transformation in her relationship with dogs has given her a better sense of how animals feel. This sensitivity has been translated into having empathy for stray animals and has rectified her former view of strays as "scary" or aggressive. Ultimately, her perspective has evolved from merely coexisting with animals to a much deeper form of caring. She discussed this transformation:

You develop a deeper understanding of how animals feel when you have pets yourself. I guess, because you see that if you forget to feed them, they'll get hungry. So, then, you realize that it apparently translates to other animals. Because if you don't have pets [you'd think that] it's scary that there are dogs on the streets because they might attack you or whatever. So that's just how the mentality is... that you coexist. But I guess the caring will only deepen or be enhanced if you have experienced having pets.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Lea, interview.

⁶⁹ Lea, interview.

The transformation from coexistence to deep care, as explained by Lea, is affirmed by Franciscan animal spirituality, the ‘pets as ambassadors’ hypothesis, and entangled empathy. In Chapter 3, I outlined the elements of Franciscan animal spirituality—one of which is sensorial and embodied—that arise from Bonaventure’s theology of the meeting of ‘macrocosm’ and ‘microcosm.’⁷⁰ Creation as macrocosm becomes a perceptible reality of our soul or the microcosm. Lea’s dogs becoming part of her responsibility has facilitated an embodied knowing of her dogs, particularly their physiological needs. Her intimate and sensorial relationship with them has renewed her relationship with animals. However, it only happened because she made an effort to give them authentic care. Lea said that she was so worried whenever they got sick. And one time when she mistakenly thought her lying dog was dead, her heart fell. These were moments when their relationship was no longer coexistence. As suggested by the ‘pets as ambassadors’ hypothesis, having companion animals can only result in empathy for other animals and nature if the person has done serious work of nourishing the relationship. In the same vein, entangled empathy argues that we can grow in empathy with animals that are distant to us when we begin with the ones close to us.⁷¹ Lea accepting the responsibility of being her dogs’ human bridged her relationship with other animals.

Similar to Lea, Patty’s appreciation for dogs has grown—from exchanging brief greetings to a perceptive and engaging relationship. Her social media habits and level of

⁷⁰ Regis J. Armstrong, “A Guide for the Mind into God,” in *Into God: An Annotated Translation of Saint Bonaventure’s Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv296mnqx.5>.

⁷¹ Lori Gruen, *Entangled Empathy: An Alternative Ethic for Our Relationships with Animals* (Lantern Books, 2015), 79.

empathy for other dogs have significantly changed ever since she became closer to her dog. Seeing posts about the passing of other dogs is now a landmark of animal connection. Patty shared:

At first, we only had a “hi-hello” relationship. But as time went by, my relationship with her has grown. I don’t watch as many K-drama series anymore. I watch more dog reels now, which I post in my feed. When people post about their dogs who have passed away, I’d cry. I’d say that they seem to look like [dog’s name]. So I’d cry. I couldn’t imagine her getting sick. I didn’t expect that I’d be a parent to her, right?⁷²

This is still a manifestation of Franciscan animal spirituality, the ‘pets as ambassadors’ hypothesis, and entangled empathy. Her proximity to her dog, coupled with the practice of care, made it possible for Patty to access an emotional connection to other dogs. Furthermore, having compassion for other dogs has allowed her to channel back greater concern for her dog. Thus, this compassion goes on a back-and-forth cycle of empathy.

B. Being with Nature and Recognizing Interrelatedness

For some participants, having companion animals has led to increased exposure to nature and a recognition of the relatedness of beings. Spending time outdoors is a bonding time for Pamela and her dog. Basking in nature with her dog is a calming time for her to reflect and de-stress. Additionally, her dog is a nature companion with whom she can truly be herself in the quiet shared by both of them. Pamela narrated:

When I left [previous workplace], my mental health got better, and it was a big decision. I would look for nature or places. I would prefer taking [dog’s name] to places. Well, of course, she’s playful. She loves running around. I’m thinking of bringing [dog’s name] to a place either with trees or that will allow me to be with my thoughts and reflect...I want to bring [dog’s name]...[because] you don’t even need to talk to the dog. The dog is just there.⁷³

⁷² Patty, interview.

⁷³ Pamela, interview.

Kaye has a similar experience with Pamela. Because her dogs like swimming, she is encouraged to go out and explore nature with them. Joining them in nature has enabled her to observe their unique habits and preferences. She noticed that they do not like rainy days because they dislike their paws getting wet. However, they like to roll in the grass and hunt crabs. She also learned particular things in nature that her dogs should stay away from so they do not fall ill. Their regular Sunday nature bonding has allowed her to know her dogs and discover new things in nature.

Jane contemplates that being in the presence of her dogs makes her one with nature, as they give her a sense of peace and relaxation. Thus, her experience of nature is bridged by her dogs in a sensorial way. She may be indoors, but the positive feelings that they stir in her make her feel that she is not far from nature. She said, “I feel that I am one with nature. I have many pets. As if you’re getting relaxed. Grounded. When I hug them, it seems there is a feeling of peace, especially when we are not doing anything and just sitting. You feel calm. There’s peace of mind. I am with nature.”⁷⁴ This insight offers a different perspective on how companion animals link us to nature. In Chapter 4, I cited that people with companion animals tend to go out more in nature to walk, which illustrates the experience of Pamela with her dog. However, Jane’s oneness with nature is embedded in the feelings that arise when she is with her dogs—hugging them and spending time with them. Nature, then, can become part of quotidian intimacies through caring for companion animals.

Patty highlighted how her care practices for her dog remind her of how things are interrelated—cleaning the surroundings for her dog’s health, using sustainable materials, and

⁷⁴ Jane, interview.

ensuring that humans also enjoy a clean living space. Tanya also implements a clean living environment for her dog.

Overall, the participants have been drawn to explore nature because of their companion animals. Their companion animals enable them to see their connection with nature more clearly. Moreover, their perceived oneness with nature motivates them to learn more about the natural world and its elements. Within the domicile, the daily care for companion animals orients the participants to recognize the importance of animal health, a clean environment, and sustainability—reflecting the interrelatedness of everything. One fascinating insight into communing with nature is that intimacy with companion animals can bring nature into the domicile.

C. Educating People and Standing One's Ground

Themes of animal cruelty surfaced in the accounts of the participants, who are cognizant of the marginalization of animals. As mentioned earlier, some have adopted or rescued companion animals with “dark pasts.” Consequently, these participants actively raise awareness about animal welfare, with some becoming more proactive in their advocacy because of their embodied knowing of their respective companion animals.

Francine constantly reminds her nieces and nephews that having companion animals requires responsibility. She sharply points out that it is not about ownership wherein you just let animals fend for themselves once you acquire them. She reminds them of the popular quote from *The Little Prince*: “You are responsible for what you have tamed.” Moreover, she recalled a gut-wrenching event involving a man in her sister's village who conducted a planned killing of cats in the neighborhood. She said that a mass grave was created. Out of

frustration over this information and other acts of violence against animals she has witnessed, she stressed, “There’s nothing we can do but educate.”⁷⁵

Having rescued dogs, Kaye is aware of their trauma and learned behaviors from the streets. She said that her rescue dogs call for her attention by using their paws. She has observed that they learned this behavior as a way to survive on the street: “It’s because they are struggling on the street. They do not have a home, no proper food. They do not get to eat on time, so that’s their way of asking for food, attention, and love. That’s their language.”⁷⁶ Over time, she noticed that her rescue dogs have outgrown it. Additionally, these dogs are sensitive to loud noises or exhibit bodily responses (i.e., shaking, barking), which she interprets as traumatic responses. This is why she is saddened by the fact that people are insensitive. People outside pick on her dogs—both children and adults—clapping loudly or riding motorbikes to instigate annoyance in her dogs. When her dogs retaliate to protect themselves, people assume they are aggressive. When people get curious about her dogs, she takes it as an opportunity to tell them that dogs are harmless. She hopes that there will be an organization that will conduct educational initiatives on animal welfare for young people. As an architect, she dreams of building a hostel that offers volunteer work to care for rescue dogs to bring more awareness to their plight.

Despite not being a “cat person,” Anna learned to appreciate cats through her relationship with her dog. Her newfound fondness for cats was vivified when she and her colleagues decided to raise funds for the treatment of adopted cats at their workplace. Anna

⁷⁵ Francine, interview.

⁷⁶ Kaye, interview.

spoke about the transformation that led her to serve these workplace cats, whom she considers “more kind than humans”:

Because of my relationship with [dog’s name], I’m able to see other creatures as creatures of God. Recently, I’ve learned to like cats. There’s a group of us that takes care of the stray kittens. There’s three of them. We went through a lot to save them. We have a hard time hiding them on the second floor. We would feed them. We don’t have funds. We would raise funds to bring the cat to the vet...They’re more than just cats, or stray cats; they’re really more companions...Again, sometimes they are more kind than humans.⁷⁷

Earlier, I discussed the struggle of Tanya against the rule on killing stray animals in their military compound. She has been a constant advocate for stray animals by ensuring that she educates her colleagues about the ethical treatment of dogs. She found out that the stray dogs killed upon being caught crossing the perimeter were consumed by her colleagues. This culture of consuming dog meat is called *azucena* (Spanish term synonymous with purity and innocence), which is a common practice in the Cordilleras, the northern part of Luzon. Recall that I discussed consuming dog meat as part of Igorot indigenous culture. Iö Mones Jularbal deduces that this practice involves gender and class attributes, as this type of dish is popular among working-class men.⁷⁸ It is believed to keep the body warm and improve one’s virility.

One time, Tanya’s colleagues joked that the dish they were eating while drinking was her dog. She cried and got emotional—which was something out of character for her. In this scenario, they trivialized the life of Tanya’s dog and overlooked her fellowship with the dog. This incident explains why they could not grasp why Tanya showed affection to her dog. Their practice is what Carol Adams critiques as the absent referent (Chapter 2, n. 63; Chapter

⁷⁷ Anna, interview.

⁷⁸ Iö Mones Jularbal, “From Main Ritual to Main Course: Dogs, Dog Meat, and the Igorot Trope,” *The Cordillera Review* XI, no. 1–2 (March–September 2021): 45, <https://thecordillerareview.upb.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2-Jularbal-21-De.pdf>.

4 n.59), where animals are transformed into an unrecognizable entity (e.g., meat, leather, milk) to hide their suffering. The concept of animals appearing as a product creates an illusion that no life was taken. Indeed, even if the colleagues of Tanya are the direct offenders whenever they prepare a dish like *azucena*, their obscuring of the animal is enacted by removing any form of tie to the animal.

Tanya called out her colleagues. Because of Tanya's response, they eventually took her concerns seriously, and their officer lifted the restrictions on having companion animals in the compound. Furthermore, her colleagues are now laying low in their dog consumption, or Tanya suspects that they are more discreet about it. She dreams of rescuing more stray animals in the future together with her siblings. For them, the measure of being financially well-off is when they can already adopt more stray animals.

The plights of animals have been revealed by the participants. Evident in the previous sections, animals navigate a world that has borders, threats to their lives, and normalized cruelty toward them. These women advance feminist animal care—elaborated in Chapter 2—by forging emotional fellowship, listening to animal voices, defending them, and extending care to other animals.⁷⁹ Their emotions are a special locus for forming their advocacy to change the patriarchal, anthropocentric, and colonial understanding of animals. Indeed, these women experience a transcendence of their immediate bond with their companion animals by co-creating a culture of care and empathy inside and outside the domicile.

⁷⁹ Josephine Donovan, "Feminism and the Treatment of Animals: From Care to Dialogue," *Signs* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 320-325, <https://doi.org/10.1086/491750>.

Conclusion

This chapter has responded to the arguments of this thesis-project rooted in the concept of ecological conversion in *Laudato Si*—a profound personal and communal renewal of our relationship with creation as the outcome of our encounter with Jesus Christ or the divine.⁸⁰ Ecological conversion, as a ministry framework, is interested in mending our relationship with creation. Based on the data, it is suggested that caring for companion animals is not a mere hobby or preoccupation, but rather a multispecies, non-hierarchical, and reciprocal ministry praxis that attends to both the companion animal and the single woman. This ministry praxis is a co-created multispecies home grounded in feminist care that dismantles systemic injustice toward both. Aside from being a site of ministry, it also functions as a home of resistance that challenges the ideology of marriage and family by forming kinship that crosses the boundaries of species, family structures, and roles.

Relationships cannot heal if unjust structures are not corrected and gradually transformed. In the previous chapters, I associated the terms kinship (Saint Francis of Assisi), universal communion (*Laudato Si*'), cosmic mutuality (Dawn Nothwehr), entangled empathy (Lori Gruen), and others to reiterate our relationship with animals and creation that has always been there but is hardly acknowledged. The intimate relationships of the participants with their companion animals animate all these attributes of communion.

The second argument of this thesis-project is that while single women minister to their companion animals, they are enriched spiritually and environmentally by them. This is an essential assertion, as this highlights that it is not only the companion animals who reap the benefits of this ministry praxis but also their human counterparts. The participants'

⁸⁰ Francis, *Laudato Si*', sec. 217.

experience of being more emotionally attuned to animals, their increased exposure to nature, their realization of the interrelatedness of everything, and their being called to advocate for animals are all evidence of being renewed environmentally.

Moreover, the experience of caring for companion animals has also developed the spirituality of the participants by becoming more prayerful, praying with creation (i.e., animals), understanding God more clearly through animal imagery, and being more accepting of others. And yet, the connection between the concepts of ministry, spirituality, and environmental awareness seems to be overlapping. To me, it confirms that ecological conversion consists of building blocks that are intertwined and intimately related—which is supported by the concept of integral ecology. Therefore, the co-created multispecies homes of the participants simulate the realization of the universal communion that we wish to achieve—always whole and connected.

Chapter 7

Conclusions: A Multispecies Home of Ministry

Woman-Animal Companionship as a Multispecies Home of Ministry

I have argued in this thesis-project that the care work of Filipino single women for their companion animals is a ministry praxis of ecological conversion—specifically, a *multispecies home of ministry*. Ecological conversion is a profound personal and communal renewal of our relationship with creation as an outcome of our encounter with Jesus Christ or the divine. They have been led to have a profound relationship with their companion animals, through embodied knowing and embracing of their being. Many of them see their companion animals as God’s creation, a manifestation of something ‘beyond,’ and a force for the renewal of their relationship with other animals and creation. The ministry praxis of these women is returned exponentially through spiritual and environmental development facilitated by their companion animals.

This thesis-project has recovered the intimate bond between single women and companion animals. As reviewed in this work, their relationship is not simply a hobby or a preoccupation that births obsession or compulsion. Neither is it a replacement for human connection in the absence of a spouse or children, as society often assumes. Their special companionship is rooted in a *call* to be kin—a mother, a sister, a guardian, or a steward—to their companion animals because of society's violent treatment of them. Stray animals are victims of abandonment, neglect, and deliberate violence. Furthermore, the methods for

managing the population of strays are rooted in colonial perspectives that carelessly handle them and punctuate their lives. Being housed, fed, and healed is imperative for them to have a second shot at life.

Single women, on the other hand, choose to *respond* to the call because of an overflowing love that transcends species, societal biases, and even personal capacities. Consequently, their relationship is grounded in the feminist practice of care—listening, obedience, emotional attunement, and honoring the other. This type of dynamic restores humanity's severed bond with creation, particularly with animals. It positions animals as beings with personhood, capacities, and rights. All these aspects of the woman-animal companionship speak to a broader definition of ministry. I have posited that women have been relegated to care work due to the patriarchal division of labor. This remains true, but their distinct sensitivity to care has afforded them the ability to hear the cries for help of their companion animals and consequently welcome them into their lives.

This work has extended how we must look at ministry—service to God and creation—by expanding where it is done (home), how it is done (homegrown and *informal*), and who is involved (women and companion animals). Moreover, as a ministry praxis, it does not only attend to the work itself, but it simultaneously resists power structures that make both animals and women suffer. With this, the framework of ecological conversion has been extended by putting women central to the narrative of care for creation, which is absent in *Laudato Si'*.

While I only directly investigated the ministry praxis of Filipino single women, it does not mean that their work cannot be and must not be duplicated. In fact, their praxis is a good reference for how ministry for creation or animals specifically must be carried out.

Restoration of Laika and Other Animals

Laika, the stray dog in Moscow who was sent into space, is symbolic of how we historically reduced animals to objects of experimentation to achieve patriarchal, geopolitical, anthropocentric, and militaristic agendas. Such treatment disparaged the life of a dog who only wanted to be rescued and loved. And yet, it was returned with temporary care that eventually led to a betrayal of her kinship—or akinship. This thesis-project has noted that animals are not mere objects to be readily disposed of when they are no longer of value or when they become a fixture that does not complement the aesthetics of built infrastructures. I have argued that animals are as valuable as humans who have the will to live. They are not passive beings who are incapable of communing with us. Regardless of their differences from us, this work has led to the recognition of their worth. We must honor and respect them simply because they, too, have dignity. Entangled empathy posits that it is not impossible to be in fellowship with them, irrespective of species, because we have always been interwoven with them. This aligns with the concept of integral ecology. Our lives are all interconnected, and we support each other's flourishing. All we need to do is hone our desire to listen and obey. By having a companion animal, we are drawn to a reciprocal bond that can renew our impaired relationship with animals, if we practice ethical approaches to care—for instance, feminist animal care.

The biblical practice of naming constitutes extending personhood to animals. The naming of companion animals is a beautiful ritual of *becoming* with them. Naming does not only give an identity to the animals but also to the relationship we create. This practice overcomes our indifference toward animals and helps us appreciate their differences from us. By naming, we call upon them, engage them in our intimacies, and permit them to impart

their wisdom to us. Therefore, it is a retrieval of their dignity lost in our language by employing demeaning animal metaphors to describe all the worst things about humans and animals alike.

With the growing number of cases of animal cruelty and violence in the Philippines and other parts of the world, this thesis-project invites people to look at the entire picture of the violence committed against animals. Evil acts against animals are never devoid of gender, class, race, and other identities that produce power imbalances. Thus, this work can shed light on the deeper issues that surround violence against animals.

As shown by the narratives of the participants, a genuine kinship with companion animals is a catalyst for a larger drive to contribute to the healing of the planet. The more we become receptive to animal voices, the greater the desire for us to care for other animals and creatures. It is like a cycle of care that bridges us to human and nonhuman beings alike.

Restoration of the *Babaylan* Image and Indigenous Practices of Animal Care

One specific element of this work is tracing the marginalization of single women in the Philippines and how it has shaped their bond with their companion animals. As noted in Chapter 6, single women receive comments and jokes about being single and opting for companion animals instead of getting married and having children of their own. This is “ambient violence” at work—not spectacular but insidious. How these words are communicated may be light and seemingly unserious, but they are products of our long struggle against colonial and imperial logics that forced us to subscribe to the patriarchal endorsements of the Church. The unreasonable fixation on the ideology of marriage and family, as argued in Chapter 5, stems from our colonial past.

The active choice of the participants to remain single and extend their care to companion animals is a concrete resistance to this patriarchal endorsement. It recovers the *babaylan* image of the Filipino woman—a revolt against the colonial making of women. Creating a multispecies home renews how the concepts of love, home, and family structures are defined in Filipino culture. Furthermore, care becomes a radical choice rather than a biologically destined duty maintained by patriarchy.

I have argued that a hierarchical and anthropocentric view of animals is colonial in nature, as it validates the Western human-animal divide. The relationship between women and animals before the colonizers arrived was more harmonious. The demonization of *babaylanes'* relationship with nature, labeled as witchcraft and demonic, is resisted by the practice of being one with animals. The feminist animal care practice of these women animates a retrieval of rich indigenous Filipino practices. Similar to the affectionate relationship of the Indigenous Visayan women with their dogs, these women place affective bonds as a foundation for their relationship. Having them share space with them in the household constitutes a stance that blurs the human-animal division. Moreover, the inclusion of companion animals in their spiritual sensibilities, prayer intentions, and religious contemplations upholds a pre-colonial valuation of animals. This work, therefore, invites us to reconsider how spirituality is defined and lived. Spirituality, as postulated by the narratives of the participants, is accessible, palpable, and well-knit into one's life. Franciscan animal spirituality is an alternative strand of spirituality that engages animals in our spiritual pursuit.

In our work to embrace indigenous animal care practices, it is significant that we foster a balanced and respectful ethical view of ritual animal consumption and *azucena*. In light of the insights of Filipino Indigenous scholars, the discernment of Indigenous peoples—

particularly the younger generations navigating these cultural shifts—of their evolving animal ethics must be respected and encouraged.

This work has revealed that the Church has contributed to the reproduction of the marginalization of single women. Therefore, from a pastoral perspective, while the Church celebrates unions, it should also recognize the vocation of single women. Affirming their care work can change how society perceives them. Among all institutions in the Philippines, it is the Church that can significantly dispel the belief that single women do not live worthwhile lives simply for not having families of their own.

From Pet Blessing to a Renewed Prophetic Voice

In my discussion in Chapter 5, the home, the Church, and the community are sites where animal cruelty is perpetuated. This thesis-project calls for the Church to maximize all opportunities to recover the value of animals in people's consciousness. In Chapter 4, I cited homiletics, catechism, and greater inclusivity for animal concerns as potential interventions. While animals have their own voice to communicate themselves, the Church— through pastoral care—would be a good place to amplify their voices. Many parishes now conduct pet blessing rituals, but I question if it is enough to change the culture of anthropocentrism deeply embedded in all facets of our lives. Thus, it is timely that the Church capitalizes on its prophetic voice to re-echo the plights of animals. Homilies that depict human-animal relations in a positive light, with a clear application, are an incisive approach.

This study has revealed that grief for a companion animal is a serious spiritual struggle. It is important to note that due to the low value many people associate with animals, this type of grief is often unacknowledged in society. Thus, looking for support can be

challenging. Support groups with people who go through the same struggle can assist in the coping and eventual healing processes of these individuals. Distributing simple *stampitas* (prayer cards) with a message of hope and a prayer can go a long way to making them feel understood and supported. Prayer requests for animals, recited at Mass, send a message that the Church also prays for animals. This is a strong statement that could slowly diminish the stigma around animal grief and elevate animals' concerns to a liturgical platform. It might also be good to allow people to bring their companion animals to church if the space can accommodate it, with inclusive guidelines for implementation. Several parishes already do this in the Philippines.

Future Research and Direction

While this thesis-project has addressed a gap in ministry, there are still areas where this work can be expanded. For future research, it would be valuable to investigate how this ministry praxis takes place in other cultures. Conducting a similar study with a group of single women from another culture may provide totally distinct insights into the experience. Additionally, including members of the LGBTQ+ community as participants can generate a different set of perspectives on multispecies homes. Subsequently, researching men's lived experiences in relation to their companion animals is a potential direction to see how women and men can collaborate in this type of ministry.

It is also productive to explore how the participants' companionship with animals bridges human fellowship. Although this was touched on by this study under spirituality, further inquiry can address the issues around demonizing human-animal companionship as a

distraction from cultivating human-to-human fellowship. While similar research exists in other fields, a contribution from practical theology is worthwhile.

Because of the viability of delivering homilies or sermons to parishioners, a research exploration on the integration of animals in homiletics can shed light on how this produces changes in perceptions of animals. Moreover, further exploring feminist pastoral care for people who go through the loss of companion animals is a valuable future direction.

During the interviews, I was elated when Francine recited the poem she wrote about her cat, and when Toni played her harp and sang the song she composed for her animals. These were such profound moments that they made me contemplate how data gathering can be improved. Thus, aside from interviews, the methodology for gathering data can be more evocative and powerful if participants are asked to journal or use art forms (e.g., drawing, music, and bodily expressions) to represent their experiences; I found this type of approach to be effective in capturing feelings and non-verbal communication, which are important sites of data.

Pieta and Deep Incarnation

While the participating single women's narratives conveyed beautiful stories of healing and restoration, I could not help but recall the account of the woman meat vendor in Olangapo who stabbed Tiger to death—a stray dog—for “stealing” a piece of meat. Like I said in Chapter 5, that heartbreaking incident cannot only be blamed on the woman, as it was proof of our broken kinship with animals shaped by complex interrelated socio-political systems. It further shows how animals become the “scapegoat” of humanity's failure to build a compassionate world that celebrates each other and sustains relationships. Tiger became

collateral damage in the culture of the absent referent. She must have been accustomed to the sight of animal blood, cut limbs, and carcasses made unrecognizable, causing her to look at Tiger as just another animal to lose. In the eyes of the woman, she was an enemy that took her livelihood—a piece of meat. Conversely, society views the woman as an aggressor, rarely noticing her own struggle to survive. Her suffering is shrouded by the culture of the absent referent—wrapped so tightly that we fail to see that she is a victim of a society that is cruel to women. It is a tragic story of the entanglement of women and animals in the Philippines.

However, if we are honest with ourselves, we have been in the position of the woman too many times to even remember. We may not have directly butchered an animal, but we have participated in their suffering. Every time we gather for a banquet, with flowing meats and animal products, we also bring death upon them. I am in no way saying that we automatically convert our diet into veganism, but I say that the capitalist lifestyle that has been ingrained in us is cruel and violent to them. The culture of consumerism is so insidious that it hides the screams, fear, and confusion of the animals led into the chamber of death.

The pain of both Tiger and the woman meat vendor is intimately intertwined. I am not convinced that their story should end with the woman spending jail time. I know the woman has acknowledged her action. Thus, I depict the restoration of their relationship—taken away by anthropocentric, patriarchal, colonial, and imperial logics—through a reimagination of the image of *Pieta*. I imagine the woman slumped on the ground, beside her stall, pained by her action toward Tiger. Tiger is bloody, lifeless, and worn out by the world. Both have suffered in this lifetime. The light beneath them is symbolic of their oneness with Christ—deeply incarnated and united with the two. They are not alone. Christ's redemptive Cross restores Tiger from hunger and pain and heals the woman from her internal brokenness. Christ's

oneness with both humans and animals in suffering is a gospel message that needs to be heard more from the pulpit, practiced seriously in all domains of our pastoral life, and shared with those who feel alone in their grief.

Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Research Title: *Woman–Animal Companionship: A Feminist Elucidation of Ecological Conversion in Laudato Si'*¹

Researcher: Gaizel Arguelles Adan, Doctor of Ministry Candidate, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA

Thesis-Project Director: Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF, Ph.D., The Erica and Harry John Family Professor Emerita of Catholic Theological Ethics, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA

Purpose of the Study

This research explores human–animal companionship as a ministry praxis among Filipino single women. The goal is to understand how relationships with companion animals shape spirituality and environmental consciousness.

Participation

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview lasting about one (1) hour, conducted online through Zoom or Google Meet. You may skip any question or stop the interview at any time.

Video Recording

With your permission, the interview will be video-recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing your responses. The recording will be stored securely and deleted completely upon completion of the research project. It will not be shared outside the research team, and excerpts will be transcribed anonymously. You may request that the recording be stopped at any time during the interview.

¹ This was the proposal title of the thesis-project, which eventually was updated to its current title, “Woman-Animal Companionship: A Multispecies Home of Ministry.” The proposal title also appears in Appendix B: Email Invitation to Participate in Research Interview.

Confidentiality

All information you provide will remain confidential. Your name and identity will not appear in any written or published material. Any quotations used will be anonymized.

Risks and Benefits

There are no known risks associated with this study. While there is no monetary compensation, your insights will contribute to the broader discussion of Filipino women's companionship with animals in the context of spirituality and environmental consciousness.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any point without consequence.

Consent Statement

I have read and understood the information provided above. By signing below, I indicate my voluntary consent to participate in this research interview.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

Participant's Signature/Initials: _____

Date: _____

Availability for Interview

Please indicate your preferred dates and times for scheduling the interview (check and fill in as appropriate):

Preferred Dates:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Preferred Times:

- ☐ Weekdays (morning) _____
- ☐ Weekdays (afternoon) _____
- ☐ Weekdays (evening) _____
- ☐ Weekends (morning) _____
- ☐ Weekends (afternoon) _____
- ☐ Weekends (evening) _____

Other preferred times: _____

Researcher's Contact Information:

Gaizel Arguelles Adan

Doctor of Ministry Candidate, Catholic Theological Union

Appendix B: Email Invitation to Participate in Research Interview

Dear _____,

I am conducting a research project entitled *Woman-Animal Companionship: A Feminist Elucidation of Ecological Conversion in Laudato Si'* as part of my Doctor of Ministry studies at Catholic Theological Union. This research examines human–animal companionship as a form of ministry praxis among Filipino single women, exploring how it influences their spirituality and environmental consciousness.

I want to invite you to participate in an interview for this project. Your experiences and insights as a companion to your pet will greatly enrich this work.

Interview details:

- **Format:** The interview will last about one hour and will be conducted online (via Zoom or Google Meet).
- **Content:** We will focus on your relationship with your companion animal/pet and how this has influenced your spiritual life and environmental consciousness. No preparation is needed; your candid reflections are most valuable. There are no right or wrong answers. Your insights will be treated as essential narratives that highlight the lived experiences of human–animal companionship.
- **Participation and Confidentiality:** Your participation is voluntary. You may decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time. All responses will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. You will not be identified by name, and no affiliations will be disclosed.
- **Benefits:** While there is no monetary compensation, your participation will contribute to broader discussions on Filipino women's companionship with animals in the context of spirituality and ecological awareness.

If you are interested, please reply to this email and kindly sign the attached informed consent form, indicating your availability for the coming weeks. I will gladly adjust to your schedule.

Your voice and perspective are critical to this study, and I would be grateful for the opportunity to learn from you.

Thank you very much for considering this invitation. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Warmly,

Gaizel Arguelles Adan
Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Catholic Theological Union

Ode to Lily

You are a cat, yes,
So you go about your days lazing around and
shedding hair,
Eating and drinking to your heart's content,
And spreading love by wreaking havoc
everywhere.

You are a cat, yes,
But I haven't known anyone or anything
choose me like you did and often do.
So excuse my grateful heart and the
mothering I tend to do.

You are a cat, yes,
And I worry about your pain before me, with
me, and without me.
So excuse the fuss I shower you with, even
when you tell (scratch!) me to let you be.

I sit here watching you wag your tail leisurely
As you sunbathe and imagine the birds you
would catch if you could fly freely.
I wonder if you know how much of a gem you
are in this gutter,
How much beauty you have added to my
muddy water.

You are a cat, yes,
And you chose me to be your human.
I hope you always will,
Even through failing health and memory,
either yours or mine, my heart you'll fill.

You are my cat, yes,
And I will always and faithfully be your
human.

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She presented her research through a guest lecture at Loyola University Chicago and conference presentations at the University of Kentucky and Indiana University Northwest. She was a 2025 scholar of the Animal Studies Summer Institute at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her doctoral research examined how Filipino single women and companion animals co-create multispecies homes of ministry that resist multilayered marginalization. In Fall 2026, she will begin a Ph.D. in Anthropology at Purdue University. The inspiration for her scholarship on animals is her dog, Pancake.