

# INSPIRATION AND PROVOCATION OF ECOFEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY

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## Abstract

The paper deals with ecofeminism. It emphasizes on ecofeminist political economy. It critically presents the roots of the ideology of ecofeminism, its various classifications and some of its representatives. Gender aspects are currently strongly present also in environmental issues, including discussions on the sustainability of development, respectively in different directions of ecological economics. Ecofeminism seeks connections between the domination of men and the enslavement of women and Mother Nature. It is a synthesis of theory and practice, seeing the relationship between the exploitation of nature, its poor condition and the historical destiny of woman - subordination and oppression. Ecofeminism strives to re-establish the balance between man and nature, which connects the feminist and environmental dimension. Ecofeminism and ecofeminist political economy are often the target of criticism not only of standard economists which appeal to common sense. The main goal of the paper is to try to answer, at least in part, the question of whether ecofeminist constructs can be an inspiration when considering systemic change and other perspectives of humanity, as well as the search for economics for the 21st century.

**Key words:** ecofeministic political economy, ecofeminism, green economic dissidents

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## Introduction

Gender aspects are now clearly evident in environmental issues, including discussions on the definition, and especially the promotion of sustainability or different directions of ecological economics. Ecofeminism or ecofeminist political economy can be a critical inspiration when considering systemic change and other perspectives of humanity.

The paper is an original scientific review which is not based on original research. It uses the data from secondary sources of scientific literature and the results of research available on the topic. The authors primary try to answer, at least in part, the question of whether ecofeminist constructs can be an inspiration when considering systemic change and other perspectives of

humanity, as well as the search for economics for the 21st century. To achieve the mentioned goal, it has been used methods of description, comparison and qualitative analysis.

## 1 Constitution of ecofeminism

*"Ecofeminism is a school of thought and a practical movement that points to the connection between the oppression of women and nature. This connection tries to explain through an examination of historical, social and symbolic circumstances respect women and nature by various feministic approaches "* (Javorská, 2016, p. 17).

Ecofeminism (F. d'Eaubonne, M. Mellor, V. Shiva, K. J. Warren, etc.) refers to the context of male domination and the enslavement of both the strength and energy of women and Mother Nature. It is a synthesis of theory and practice, seeing the connection between the exploitation of nature, its poor condition and the historical destiny of women - subordination and oppression. The global capitalist and patriarchal system are to control the people of the South, women and nature in this context. The roots of these approaches are associated with the women's peace movement, the current overlap of ecofeminism into the environmental and feminist movement (including intersections with gender mainstreaming) can be found in women's environmental organizations and their networks or in UN efforts to promote a gender perspective on environmental issues, etc.<sup>1</sup>.

Ecofeminism, in general, seeks to restore the balance between man and nature, while connecting the feminist and environmental dimensions. The importance of local communities, the cooperation of women, men and children and a respectful attitude towards nature are emphasized. Critics focus on reproduction in nature as well as human reproduction, where the traditional knowledge of a woman's mother is shifted to a male doctor. Various parallels are found between a woman caring for the family and nature and nature as a breadwinner, with references to feminist critiques of standard economics oriented to monetary profit and market activities, having a close to ecological economics (Henderson, 1996, 2007).

The feminine principle and the return to old feminine values should be key to the pursuit of sustainable development. Feminine values should include love, affection, real human relationships, contact with nature and life, motherhood, music, dance, poetry, literature, the well-being and peace of home, beautified art, enlivened by flowers, animals and children.

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<sup>1</sup> In the world and our country, the representation of women in non-governmental ecological institutions is growing, the number of worshipers of Mother Nature and natural women's cycles is growing, and the term bio-mother has already become a part of the common vocabulary. Feminine values should begin to surface slowly in this area as well.

Instinctively emotional and compassionate women should be closer to Mother Nature, be more connected to her powers, more sympathetic to her and more mourn her devastation, including public crying over climate change. Men, on the other hand, should be "*climate cold*".

At the same time, environmental activists must fight the contempt and trivialization of their campaigns. It also applies to mystical forms of ecofeminism seeking to feminize religion, for example, in the spirit of returning to pagan rituals, in the context of New Age currents, or dreaming of mythical primordial matriarchy as a noble "*golden age*", including worshipping the Woman Goddess.

## 2 The interweaving of feminism and environmentalism

Ecofeminist concepts – as a connection between feminist ideology and environmental analysis - emphasize the importance of the relationship between woman and nature. The intertwining of ecofeminism with feminism can be illustrated by the classification of feminist approaches to the relationship between woman and nature according to (King, 1989). The first, refusing, approach argues that woman, like nature, is perceived as the "*second*" to male, culture, which puts her in a subordinate position (Beauvoir, 1949). The only way for a woman to be liberated is to cut off the woman from nature and her equal connection with culture. On the contrary, the second, glorious, approach in the relationship between woman and nature sees the strengthening of femininity. A form of this strengthening can be an emphasis on female spirituality and intuition, which are often placed as opposed to male rationality. The positive connection between women and nature is demonstrated in ancient myths about the Goddess Mother Nature and the natural cycles of women. And the third approach is to be ecofeminism, which is to question the duality of the relationship between nature and culture. It shows how the historical and social connection between woman and nature was supposed to create a different life experience of the relationship with nature for women and men. It promotes the use of women's experience of *connection* with nature.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The intertwining of feminism with environmentalism can be documented by the direct classification of ecofeminism among the currents of environmental ethics (Javorská, 2010, 2016). Its harmonious connection with bioregionalism is also mentioned. In (Mellor, 1998) ecofeminism is classified as radical environmentalism. Relationships and connections with close deep ecology or environmental philosophy are also discussed, where ecofeminism criticizes both spheres for insufficient involvement of feminist optics. Ecofeminism is criticized by social ecology for its spirituality and essentialism.

Ecofeminism operates with an analogy of the current state of nature, including its destruction, looting and exploitation, and the unequal, subordinate position of women in society, resp. their oppression. It points to a woman's life experience, closely connected with the reproductive function (procreation and care of children, care of the household, etc.). Enhancing and enhancing a woman's life experience should be a path to a different perception of nature and a more environmentally sensitive approach.

Women are expected to experience more often and earlier negative environmental impacts. According to the ideas of ecofeminism, it should contribute to the overall positive change by involving women's life experience in science, environmental protection, decision-making processes and the equal status of women in society. It is to be prevented by a hierarchy (of the patriarchy type), which is to set the male life experience as standard, i.e. superordinate. Although this hierarchy may not be easily recognizable at first glance in today's Western world, it should still work.

Ecofeminist critique of hierarchy and dualism operates by conceptual frameworks in the spirit (Warren, 2000) in the sense of a set of *"basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions that shape and reflect how one sees oneself and one's world"* (ibid., p. 46). It is supposed to be *"socially constructed glasses"* with which we look at the world and which are shaped by factors such as gender, gender, race, nationality, religion, age, marital status or culture. Ecofeminist criticism concludes that *"the dualism of opposing values and the resulting hierarchy on which Western civilization is built is the reason for the inferior position of nature, women, other cultures and other forms of life"* (Javorská, 2010, p. 20). The supremacy of the culture of Western civilization and the resulting power is a reason, as well as a justification for the use of nature and women. According to ecofeminist perception, this should have significant environmental consequences, namely the critical state of nature. By levelling the relationship between man and woman, nature and culture, it should then be possible to bring about a complete transformation of society and thus of the environment. One of the ways should be the adequate involvement of women's life experience in nature protection, in science, in decision-making processes and the overall participation in the creation of culture.

### **3 Ecofeminist political economy in the stream of ecofeminism**

Even ecofeminism is not uniform and can be divided - according to (Kiczka, 1998): 1) radical ecofeminism (demanding the upliftment of nature, including the worship of the ancient Mother Nature as the Goddess and with her women as the giver of life); 2) cultural ecofeminism (with

an emphasis on the values in a given culture associated with femininity); 3) social ecofeminism (the most moderate, with a focus on care ethics with values and ecologically desirable aspects, which it does not understand as a gender feature, but recognizes that in Western civilization is more related to women).

Other divisions combine radical and cultural ecofeminism. And include socialist and anarchist ecofeminism to the social (Pepper, 1996). The first group is to be associated with essentialism, the second group to materialism. According to (Lehečková, 2016) there is ecofeminism "*essentializing*" and "*non-essentialist branch of ecofeminism*". The first explains the relationship between gender and nature by viewing women as beings closely connected with nature based on biological disposition- essence (women menstruate, give birth, breastfeed, are more caring and sensitive). He combines the masculine essence with rationality, strength and culture, which transforms and devastates nature. Devastation is supposed to occur as a result of the oppression of women and their access to environment. The second direction (M. Mellor, S. G. Harding) questions the existence of determining essences. They do not view the differences between men and women biologically but as a product of socialization. Not every woman needs to share female qualities, and not every man needs to be a rational, strong warrior, or to devastate nature.

Contemporary ecofeminism faces "*greater criticism for its essentialism*" in connection with the increasingly clear deconstructivist approach in feminism. "*Thus, the main ecofeminist thinkers take refuge in various corners of environmentalism. Some profile themselves more as environmental economists (e.g. Mary Mellor), some as anti-globalization activists (Vandana Shiva) or peace activists (Karen Warren)*" (Javorská, 2016, p. 19).

Ecofeminism also questions the objectivity of science, which is based, for example, on the feminist concept of situated knowledge - in the spirit (Haraway, 1990). According to this, knowledge and cognition should never be in itself in space and should not be examined by an objective, unbiased scientist. It is necessary to respect otherness (experience, culture, gender, part of the natural environment).

Ecological economics is often called a promising area, which M. Mellor connects with feminism in the form of ecofeminist political economy. Mellor (2006, 2010) goes deeper than many other feminists, resp. ecofeminist concepts. Mellor criticizes the whole system, not only associating the problems with discrimination against women. It seeks to consider the daily physical and life cycles of man, from which the modern economy - based on masculine values and masculine experience - is to be detached. At the same time, secession concerns not only invisible women's work but also the entire ecosystem. Mellor criticizes that male economic

models do not take into account biological time (for rest, regeneration, childhood, maturation or ageing) or ecological time (in terms of the life cycle of renewal, time that will take away the consequences of human activity, if possible).

Standard economists overlook the importance of non-monetary activities, mutual assistance, feelings, wisdom, ecosystems, self-supply or wild nature. Mellor is not limited to systemic criticism, but also tries to find solutions to the problems of the already de facto unsustainable system that the male economy has established and helps to maintain. She finds inspiration in the history of the cooperative movement and in economic localization perceiving cooperatives as a real alternative to private ownership. She values small-scale positives, local production, local consumption and regional cash flows of economic localization. Mellor appeals to the need to change the monetary system, which also marginalizes women.

M. Mellor considers a free market economy to be a fiction because the private sector will always be dependent on the public one. And Mellor also sees money as an essential social and political institution for that the state guarantees and is responsible. The key to change is to dismantle private banking and funds. The new financial architecture is to include state-regulated non-profit and cooperative institutions.

Green economist H. Henderson also belongs to (not only) economic dissidents. It criticizes the current form and perspectives of globalization (Henderson, 1996, 2001) or draws attention to the dependence of the world economy on fossil fuels. While not believing in the *"invisible hand of the market"*, it emphasizes the role of governments in determining economic development through various instruments, including international agreements. She considers private ownership to be important on a small scale. But it should become counterproductive when accumulated at the level of multinational companies. Therefore, she proclaims the importance of cooperatives, community land associations, movements such as fair trade or corporate social responsibility (Henderson, 1981, 2003).

Henderson comes up with an ecological critique of standard economic postulates and doctrines, warning of economists' contemptuous attitudes toward nature. H. Henderson likens the current *"overall productive system"* to a cake consisting of four layers. At the bottom lies *"Mother Nature"*, which provides us with many unpaid services (e.g. climate control, water self-purification) and free *"goods"* (food, water, raw materials). It is the first floor, the largest and basic floor. The second layer of the non-monetary economy rests on the *"production of nature"*. It is a *"hidden"* or *"informal"* economy that also *"produces"*. At the same time, it is connected with unpaid activities, which are mainly carried out by women (housework, raising children, mutual assistance, care for the sick and the elderly, etc.). Henderson calls these

activities - necessary for the functioning of the economy and the whole society, but traditionally overlooked by economists - "*the economy of love*". Above this layer is the third floor of the cake - the public sector, which depends on the lower two floors. These include, for example, road management, sewerage, bridges, schools, public transport, provided by the state or municipalities. Only as the "*icing*" on the cake is the market economy. (Johanisová, 2008). Economists traditionally identify the monetary part of the cake (upper floor with "*icing*") with the whole cake. Thus, for example, they overlook the importance and values of self-supply, which still plays a significant role in a large part of the world's population, especially the rural type. This has implications for the construction of GDP-type aggregates, where again the first two layers of the cake usually disappear.<sup>3</sup>

The very foundations of standard economic theory, including the basic principles of the functioning of capitalist market economies, slightly undermine the critical considerations of other socio-economic dissidents. E.g. regarding exponential growth, where M. Kennedy identifies compound interest as the source of the problem as "cancer of our social and economic system" (Kennedy, Kennedy, 1995).

Kennedy reflects on the pitfalls of money that arise in the form of debt and suggests a radically different way of creating and circulating it. It follows on from S. Gesell (Sirůček, 2015) and connects the leading cause of social and ecological problems with the interest system. He also associates the "*Interest rate machine*" with the main reason of inflation, which he considers an attempt to manage ever-increasing debts. She sees the solution, in the spirit of Gesell, in the circulation fee (Kennedy, Ehrenschwendner, 2011). It also calls for land reform (higher taxation) and attaches a proposal for tax reform, which pursues mainly environmental objectives. The essence is the taxation of production instead of work, where the tax on production also includes environmental costs. Thus, the tendency to replace work with automation should be curbed, which should lead to higher employment. For example, the removal of income taxes would legalize the shadow economy.

Feminist economics tends to sharply criticize (neo) liberal ideology, the dogma of the "*invisible hand*", international trade based on the principle of comparative advantage, excessive

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<sup>3</sup> Various externalities are often overlooked, even at the global level. At the same time, the success of Western economies (measured by GDP) should always be critically dependent on the ability of the upper floors of the cake, especially the monetary activities of the market and the state, to pass on their social and environmental costs to the lower levels. This externalization can then take the form of, for example, global warming, the disintegration of local social ties and cohesion, or the looting of resources in other countries.

specialization, the growth imperative and the system of "*global monetocracy*" (Johanisová, 2008). Alternatives to interest-free money lending or self-help projects are discussed. Inspiration and solutions are non-standardly found in cooperative, guild or civic organizations, other pre-capitalist institutions, local economies, deglobalization processes, etc.

A broader perception of international trade is another popular topic in feminist economics. The collection (Van Staveren et al., 2007) recapitulates the analysis of complex relationships between gender inequality and international trade.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

Ecofeminist concepts bring some fresh insights into economics and contain several ideas and inspirations. However, it is necessary to approach them critically and with common sense, freeing oneself from the dogmas of the feminist faith. Like other currents of feminist economics, these should not be completely ignored, but here too it can be stated that with no more generally acceptable alternative do they bring. They are also accused of the fact that the fashionable call for sustainability is in the market boundaries of the capitalist system a mere illusion and fiction (Raworth, 2017).

As another, but already a relatively separate topic, women can be discussed as actors in sustainable development. E.g. Agenda 21 - as a global concept for sustainable living - adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 during the UN conference states that women play an important role in caring for the environment and sustainable living. Women have sufficient knowledge and experience to do so to decide on the management and protection of natural resources. But there are also radical challenges to the feminine principle and feminine values that must be resurrected in order for the world to emerge from the crisis. If the feminine principle dominated the world, "*humanity would not waste titanic efforts and dizzying sums to produce rockets, tanks, bombers, nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, thousands of nuclear warheads*" (Van Lysebeth, 2019).

Under the current arrangements, only women are said to be prepared to become bearers of ideas that contribute to the actual fulfilment of the ideal of sustainability. Including ideas about the need for interconnection between people, because usually, only women have to attach much more critical to connect with others than to themselves. Unlike men who have to be adapted to pursue their own goals, even at the expense of other people. Women should be used

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<sup>4</sup> Feminist economics aims to enrich the study of international trade through theoretical modelling, econometric analysis and policy-oriented contributions. Using data from various developed countries or case studies across countries.



to understanding themselves in terms of responsibility for the well-being of others, often to their own detriment. (Miller, 1976). One of the ways to remedy is associated with a holistic education, teaching a holistic view of the world. Which is not only talked about but in whose spirit, it is above all. The holistic connection of art, science and practical life is to bring holistic satisfaction. However, other feminist constructs (Ferguson, 1989) recall that the biology of men and women does not yet create the preconditions that automatically all women must be caregivers, protectors, and peacemakers, and all men must be warriors and destructive monsters.

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