

Women, Economy and Labour Relations



Ecofeminism on the Edge

Theory and Practice

Edited by

Goran Đurđević and Suzana Marjanić

Ecofeminism on the Edge

WOMEN, ECONOMY AND LABOUR RELATIONS

Series Editor: Martina Topic, Leeds Beckett University, UK

This series aims to publish monographs and edited collections that tackle the position of women in the economy as well as explore labor relations. By labor relations, it means studying human relations in work in its broadest sense and analyzing how labor relations affect social inequality with particular reference to women. In terms of social inequality, this series particularly welcomes analyses of women and class and broader analyses of labor relations. The series will publish perspectives from around the world and thus the series fits into the understanding of labor relations through both work relations in a Western sense and non-Western forms of labor. The series is also interested in studies of the position of women in worker's unions, the stance on women's affairs within workers' unions, and the position of women and women's affairs in labor movements. Both historical and contemporary perspectives are welcome. Studies in industrial and economic sociology are particularly welcome.

The book series aims to publish books from a variety of perspectives, e.g., the series will equally accept both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Also, the book series will accept case study perspectives on women working in various industries. We would particularly like to hear from authors who research the position of women in working-class jobs, e.g., factory workers, supermarket workers, etc. Studies on women in feminized industries (e.g., nursing, teaching, PR) and masculine industries (construction, business, finance) are equally welcome. The main aim of this book series is to deconstruct women's position in the economy and explore labor relations from a feminist perspective. All feminist perspectives are welcome, which includes liberal feminist perspectives, as well as analyses of the position of women from radical and socialist feminist positions. In the case of the latter, we particularly welcome proposals that tackle the economic system and inequalities with special reference to the position of women. The proposed books should particularly focus on analyzing structural problems that bring about inequality, the distinctiveness of women's contributions to the economy, work conditions and masculinities in organizations and wider societies and differences between men and women. Besides, books that tackle economic systems and link this to the position of women are also welcome.

Ecofeminism on the Edge: Theory and Practice

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About the Editors

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Sandra Iršević, Ph.D. student, University Educons, Belgrade (Serbia). Iršević (1973) is a Journalist from Subotica. She has been the Editor-in-chief of the independent informative portal Ecofeminism.com (www.ecofeminizam.com) since 2016, and a Correspondent for *TV Pink* since 2019. She has a Master's degree in Communication (Singidunum Faculty of Media and Communication) and is a Doctoral candidate in Digital Production at EducOn University. She has been working in journalism since 1998 and has worked in television, print, radio, and online portals. She started her career at *Subotica News*, continued at *Dani* magazine, and from 2000 to 2015, she worked at the local television station YUECO in Subotica. She was a journalist, editor, author, and host of the show *The Face of Subotica* (15 years) and *On the Trail* (6 years). From 2009 to 2019, she was a

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Martina Topić is a Behavioral Sociologist and a Mass Communications Scholar. She is currently a Reader at Leeds Beckett University, UK. She is an author and a lead of the EUPRERA Network on Women in PR and a Research Lead for the #WECAN project (Women Empowered Through Coaching and Networking) funded by the UK Government and the European Social Fund. She is an author of *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Affairs in the British Press: An Ecofeminist Critique of Neoliberalism* (Routledge, 2021) and *Comms Women Initiative Promoting and Celebrating Achievements of Women Working in Mass Communications Industries*.

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Foreword to the Book: Why Do We Need Ecofeminism?

“...it is impossible, within patriarchy, to suppress a market economy. And it is impossible, in a market system, to not devastate the planet. It is up to women, now, to reclaim the voice of humanity...”
(d'Eaubonne, [1990]1997: 4)

The poignant quote above, from one of the mothers of ecofeminism, outlines what this form of feminism is about. It is a distinctive position to feminist research that, unlike many other approaches, tries to speak to everyone, women, indigenous people and ethnic minorities, those suffering discrimination because of their social class, speciesism, etc. It does so by focusing on the critique of capitalism and the environmental destruction capitalism inevitably brings, regardless of what proponents of the so-called green capitalism say (Topić, 2021), but it puts women at the center of ecological struggle and also tackles technology as an issue in environmental protection. In addition to that, ecofeminism speaks of speciesism which is seen as part of the masculine ideology where humanity dominates the planet first through speciesism and this discrimination then cascades down to enforce the domination of genders, races, and classes through anthropocentrism (Topić, 2021; Warren, 1990; Alloun, 2015; Mayer, 2006; Iovino, 2013; Bahofen, 1990; Holy, 2007). In a nutshell, ecofeminism tackles -isms: racism, sexism, and speciesism and it is an anti-capitalist critique of economic and social conditions that lead to the inequality of races, species, and women (Salleh, 2000). In that, ecofeminism celebrates women's role in preserving the environment and there are many studies outlining the historical role of women in the environmentalist movement (Mallory, 2006; Brownhill and Turner, 2020; Goldstein, 2006; Holy, 2007; Leahy, 2003; McStay and Dunlap, 1983).

As a movement, ecofeminism generally celebrates women and their differences and diversity, including criticism of the so-called women male dealers or those who embrace masculinity and join the masculine world, thus leaving the majority of women behind. Some women are indeed tougher than men and work hard to abandon any association with femininity such as proving that they are not soft, emotional and can get the job done, thus they can be found as successful in open markets, armed forces and military interventions, etc. (Brownhill and Turner, 2020). In my own research into women in mass communication

industries, advertising, public relations and media, this proved to be the case and I used the concept of *blokishness* to argue that only *blokish* women, or those who embrace masculine characteristics, succeed in the organizational life of mass communication industries and go ahead in their careers. Some of these masculine characteristics include aggression, boldness, directness, competence, toughness, competitiveness, tomboy upbringing, not being a woman's woman or a girly girl, etc. (Topić, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c; Topić and Bruegmann, 2021; Mills, 2014).

In other words, the problem is not in men per se but a masculine identity which is conceptualized and defined, in patriarchy, with domination and conquering and this includes nature, women and those perceived as others such as non-white races, for example. While studying discrimination is not new, ecofeminism opposes the separation of humanity from nature, thus offering a distinctive critique and an empirical tool to study inequality because ecofeminism speaks of interconnectedness between nature and developing new relationships based on ecological responses (Donovan, 1990). According to ecofeminists, humans should be one with nature, however, "capitalist patriarchal economies rest heavily on a profound human alienation from nature, one that is generated in the exploitation of people's labour and resources" (Canavan et al., 2010: 184). Therefore, ecofeminists often express criticism of technology as a fundamentally masculine way of controlling nature and further damaging the planet, thus arguing that the survival of humans is threatened despite masculine advances in industrialization and technology. Some ecofeminists argued that "it is continually assumed that the economic 'costs' are limited to some lost growth within continued growth and that innovation and technological change ('progress') will be sources of solutions to any given environmental problem" (Gills and Morgan, 2020: 6, emphasis in the original). For example, *geoengineering* is an attempt to control nature through technological intervention, with technology meddling in Earth's processes to reverse climate change such as Carbon Dioxide Removal (removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere), iron fertilization of oceans (to increase the production of algae blooms) and Solar Radiation Management (to reflect sun's rays back into space to reduce temperatures) (Sikka, 2017; Hulme, 2014; Preston, 2012). Buck et al. (2014) argued that most of the demographic pushing for this agenda is male, thus also anthropocentric and with an instrumentalist view of nature, which fits into the "masculine temperament of abstraction, objectivity, precision and calculation" (p. 653). Thus, a critique of capitalism is needed because

[...] market mechanisms and the logic of capitalism in the form of an expansionary capital accumulation system. By default, it leads to a de-emphasis of the positive or even necessary role for prohibitions, large scale state intervention, government planning, and regulation, in halting and reversing material expansion. Moreover, it entirely ignores radical social change organized "from below" (substituting for this the green consumer). (Gills and Morgan, 2020: 6)

Therefore, as humans, we have a fragmented and hierarchical relationship with nature "rooted in a culture where science and technology are posited as the

epitome of reason in contract with pre-modernity, which was centred around nature, myth and religion” (Cross, 2008: 29). A part of the rise of modernity and growth of science and scientific reasoning led by “a masculine way of thinking of the world” (Bordo, 1986: 441) is connected to Cartesian dualistic objectivism, which resulted in an instrumental role of nature where humanity denies its connection with nature and attempts to dominate it instead (Singer, 2002). This is an anthropocentric position toward nature where humans are seen as having the right to exploit nature and the planet because they see themselves as at the center of the universe (Godfrey, 2008).

What is particularly relevant for ecofeminism is the notion that women and men are fundamentally different and act differently from one another (Scharff, 1995). This is one area that has not been enormously explored despite its research potential. I have done some work in this area, for example by looking at how women lead eco-villages (Topić, 2020) and by analyzing the press’ writing on economic growth, global warming, food waste, corporate social responsibility and plastic (Topić, 2021). In the first case, I looked at whether women founded eco-villages, and if so, which values are these villages founded on, whether the vision and philosophy of eco-villages are at least partially founded on the values of ecofeminism, which are anti-hierarchy, equality, collectivism, and whether there are differences between villages founded by women and those founded by men. In the case of the latter, I looked at how journalists write about economic growth and environmental affairs, who writes about it, whether there is a problem with speciesism, whether technology is presented as a solution to environmental problems, and whether there is a prevalent masculine view of economic growth and environmental affairs. In both studies, I found differences between men and women, as per ecofeminist theory, and fundamentally different points of view. In eco-villages research, the findings have shown that eco-villages formed by women tend to have less hierarchy, more collectivism and higher equality while eco-villages formed by men tend to have more hierarchy and are more inclined to have some form of capitalist rule (Topić, 2020). In research on the environmental affairs in the British press, it turned out that women have merged into the masculine culture of newsrooms, a finding well-known from journalism research (Mills, 2014; Topić and Bruegmann, 2021) and write in a masculine way advocating for economic growth, but they still do so to a lesser extent than men thus opening a question what would happen if more women joined politics and economics, two prestigious beats in journalism traditionally occupied by male journalists (Topić, 2021).

Therefore, why do we need to study ecofeminism? Or is ecofeminism still alive, as the editors of this book ask? It is not as alive as other forms of feminism, and it cannot be called mainstream in feminist research. What is more, some see it as a relic of the past but this form of feminist inquiry has been revived by some of us who have started to use it to study inequality, myself and editors of this book, authors from several countries who contributed chapters, and main authors and mothers of ecofeminism such as Ariel Salleh, also an author in this book, still write and live this philosophy. However, the reason we need to revive it and work harder to make it visible and more popularized is because this form of feminism

focuses on studying and celebrating women, first and foremost, in all of their diversity, thus ecofeminism is inclusive, diverse and speaks to everyone. What is more, it is a form of feminism that can be operationalized in empirical research so that ecofeminists like me, who are trained as social scientists, can use it without losing anything from their original training. Ecofeminism also bridges disciplines and belongs to nobody in particular but to everyone in general.

In this book, editors used ecofeminism to explore theories and discourse, art and practices, thus using ecofeminist framework to bridge disciplines with a total of 16 papers written by 21 authors from Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, France, the Netherlands, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Spain, and the UK. In the first part, on theories and discourses, chapters provide ecofeminist readings of media studies, anthropology and environmental humanities, looking at issues such as political and eco oppression, media representation of ecofeminist audiences, ecofeminist aspects of Slavic gymnastics for women, relationship with animals and ecocriticism and ecofeminism. In the arts section, chapters elaborate on literature, fairy tales, films, and visual art. In the third section, chapters talk about ecofeminism and women's position in Bolivian society and Nigerian rural areas, as well as ecofeminist readings of law and Anthropocene, creative work and women and ecofeminism from the perspective of one of its mothers, Ariel Salleh. The chapters, with so many topics and disciplinary perspectives, demonstrate the value of this theoretical and philosophical framework, and along with my social science approach to ecofeminism, show that ecofeminism is far from dead and should be promoted and used more because only an approach that tries to speak to everyone and that looks at structural inequalities and goes deeper than men versus women dichotomy can help us understand and address the most pressing issues of today, including the climate change that threatens us all. In the world of climate change, what approach could tackle this better than the one that takes inequality between humanity and nature as its central point of epistemological and philosophical inquiry?

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