

“Is Ecofeminism a Curse or a Bliss? A Critical Study”

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Abstract:

Ecofeminism is a term that includes various perspectives which are deep-rooted in the different feminist practices. All these views do not only mirror the different feminist perspectives but also a wide understanding of nature and explanations of the growing environmental difficulties. Ecofeminism is considered an environmental movement because of its plain similarities in the modern world between the present situation of women and nature. There are different pros and cons of ecofeminism. Some support the importance of this movement and its effectiveness, and others ignore its vitality and are against its existence. The objective of this paper is to describe ecofeminism, trace its history, and explain its purpose to conclude that it has merits more than defects. The overall idea is that ecofeminism is a bliss and not a curse.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Environmental movement, Nature, Female, Merits, Defects

Introduction:

The ecologically damaging nature of the contemporary world is becoming progressively unprotected and challenged because of a wider scientific and social recognition of abundant problems of the environment. (Barnett, 2001, p.1). In the West, a great and growing body of literature on ecofeminism relates gender and environment essentially in ideological terms. Ecofeminism is a movement and an ideology that sees gender equality, climate change and social injustice more broadly as basically related issues, all tied to masculine domination in society. The link between the unfair dominance of women and unfair dominance of nature is the main concern of ecofeminism (Warren, 2000, p. 1). Thus, Ecofeminism was originally connected with the opinion that women and nature are connected in morally substantial ways because both are identified with femininity (Batrićević and Paunović, 2019).

Of the late 1970s and the early 1980s, ecofeminism appeared in the West as a result of the peace, ecology movements and global feminist. The American marine biologist Rachel Carson in her book *Silent Spring* was the first to complain from the pollution and protest against degradation of nature. Carson's book encouraged an influential environmental movement that culminated in the nationwide Earth Day of 1970. But only in the mid 1970's did women's collective voices become central to the greening of the Earth (Diamond et al 1990: ix). Thus, ecofeminism began in the 1970s as a political movement. In 1972, Françoise d'Eaubonne developed the term ecological feminism discussing that "the destruction of the planet is due to the profit motive inherent in male power". In her book *Le féminisme ou la mort* or *Feminism or death* (1974), she formally presented the term ecofeminism. The term embodied women's potential for producing an ecological revolution to confirm the existence of human on the planet. That would require new relations between humans and nature, women and men. From the time, ecofeminism has aimed at showing that there are significant connections among the domination of women and nature (Merchant 1990: 100; Adams 1993: xi; Warren 2000: 21). Nearly in 1976, the theory of ecofeminism was further developed by Ynestra King. In 1980, it became a movement, with the organization, in the same year, of the first ecofeminist conference – "Women and Life on Earth: Ecofeminism in the 80s", at Amherst, Massachusetts, US (Spretnak, 1990).

Why is there a connection between ecology or nature and feminism? Actually, it is a practical question. The ecofeminists support the link between women and nature through the spread the fact that ancient rituals centered on the Mother Goddess, the moon, animals and the female reproductive system. This prehistoric time, involved the worship of the goddess, was removed by the appearance of the culture of the patriarchy with male gods to whom the female gods were submissive. Additionally, in the 17th century, nature was further degraded by the Scientific Revolution, that replaced the nurturing earth with the "metaphor of a machine to be controlled and repaired from outside...The earth is to be dominated by male developed and controlled technology, science and industry" (Merchant 1992, p. 191). Therefore, nature was deteriorated by the authority of the male that controlled through mainly science and technology.

It is noticed that women and nature are in the same position; they are described as subservient subjects. So, according to the ecofeminists, they are suitable for the subjects of oppression and diverse forms of social inequalities. Women are often seen as "untamed" and "wild" and this is exactly as nature itself. Subsequently, men must "tame" the women (and not educate them) in the same manner as the nature: by restricting their freedom and rights, or even by all means of violence. However, as Vandana Shiva says, there is some-thing "very wrong", if you must use violence to be able to cooperate and communicate with others (Shiva 1988: 48).

Historically, men have been identified with culture, reason and the realm of the mental, while women have been identified with nature, emotion and the realm of the physical. Culture is defined as that which is made by humans. Nature is defined

as that which is not made by humans. When women are seen as closer to nature, they also become less than men. Women join with nature. Women as nature are mechanical and non-human. The public realm of politics and business is thus seen as being superior, and it is associated with men. The specific realm of the family, childcare and home is seen as inferior and henceforth related to women. This explains the inferiority of women. Such explanation is often related to an exaggerated highlighting on the superiority of reason and its separation to inferior emotions. (Roach 1991, p. 51; Warren 2000, p. 50, 52).

In ecofeminism, the domination of women (as studied in traditional feminism) equals the domination of nature and that this mutual domination has caused the destruction of the environment by the controlling patriarchal society. In feminism, scholars consider that a theoretical, historical and symbolic connection happens between the domination of nature and women. This philosophy is centered on certain principles (Warren, 1990, p. 1) there are spirited connections between the oppression of nature and women, 2) understanding these connections is crucial for the awareness of the two veins of oppression, 3) feminist theory must involve an ecological perspective, and vice versa (Warren 1987).

Different works by feminists as Susan Griffin (1978) and Mary Daly (1978), Carolyn Merchant (1980), Ynestra King (1981), Ariel Kay Salleh (1984), Karen Warren (1987, 1990), Val Plumwood (1993) and others, stress on the connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, and “why feminist issues can be addressed in terms of environmental concerns” (Gaard 1993, p. 4). Also, there are plenty of scholars and critics examine the importance and vitality of ecofeminism and its effectiveness. On the other hand, there are some ignore the usefulness of this movement on the whole society. Therefore, is ecofeminism considered an effective movement for improving the state of both nature and woman, or it will passively affect them. Hence, will ecofeminism be a curse or a bliss?

Review of Literature

A lot of thinkers and writers deal with ecofeminism in their studies and writings. They try to give a full account of it from different perspectives. They are sometimes concise or general. They concentrate on different ideas of ecofeminism. These previous studies are the main reason behind the existence of this present research. This research tries to introduce the ideas around ecofeminism to give, at the end, an answer of the main question of the research that if ecofeminism a curse of a bliss. As a result, these previous studies are important to the present research.

Lahar (1991), in his study, offers several guiding factors for the development of ecofeminism as a moral theory. Most important to the core of ecofeminism's strength are close links between theory and political activism. He clarifies the idea that ecofeminism is very central to the field of politics. (p.31)

Dobscha (1993), in her paper, tries to argue why women are playing such a central part and how ecofeminism, a branch of feminist theory, can be applied to the area of environment to clearly show the connection between women and the natural environment.

Molyneux et al (1995) mentions that ecofeminism draws upon a varied range of theoretical and political schemes. They draw theoretical concepts from environment and ecological studies, especially regarding the interdependence of life. Another motivation comes from development studies, critiques of science and modernism, philosophy and a range of feminist theorizing and activism (p.86).

Cuomo (2002) finds most inspiring in Ecofeminist Philosophy, and concentrates on the ideas of Karen Warren's book Ecofeminist Philosophy (2000). With her notable contribution, Warren has played a significant role in forming ecofeminism as a prominent philosophy and practice for the modern age.

Kessler (2008) examines the basic arguments of ecofeminism and its implications for both concepts as well as on political theory in general. As part she concentrates on the issue of dualisms. She examines how these dualisms are constructed within a patriarchal society, how they are challenged and criticized by ecofeminists, and what kind of vision ecofeminists create to overcome those dualisms, and so all forms of oppression.

According to Baćanović (2011) in her study that ecofeminism is based on gender perspective that is taken as an active element of the process of environmental protection. Gender equality policy has extended, not only as a necessity for better involvement of women in political life, but also in other forms of social activities. Ecofeminism is based on gender perspective that is taken as an active component of the process of environmental protection. (p.7)

Ling (2014) emphasizes, in his study, that ecofeminism is the feminism concerned with on ecology and is the latest development of feminist theory. As an ecological movement led by women, ecofeminism has experienced a process from spontaneity to consciousness of practice; as a feminist school, ecofeminism contains many sub-branches and sub-schools. Nevertheless, ecofeminism adheres to a basic theory that the patriarchy is the origin of natural domination and gender domination. It is essential to follow to the union of feminism and ecology principles for the resistance of the patriarchy.

Lauwers (2016) suggests to draw on the latest developments in the field of ecofeminist studies and from her personal experience as a young academic writer working on ecofeminism, so as to explain the ecofeminist approach to limits and angles on the one hand. It also aims to demonstrate how the problems ecofeminism encountered in successfully dealing with its problematic transdisciplinarity might serve to support further other interdisciplinary research in Anglo-American studies.

Pompeo-Fargnol (2018) in his article creates an essence for the approach of an ecofeminism approach to counseling and therapy by reviewing the roots, theoretical foundations, related conceptual frameworks, and context of ecofeminism. It offers a basis and strategies for applying an ecofeminist perspective in the serving professions, and describes how it can be applied in several settings with varied client populations.

Batrićević¹ and Paunović (2019) analyse the present concept of the security of the environment in addition to the development and contemporary discourses in ecofeminist movements, and to explain the connection between them, i.e., the role of ecofeminism to the shift in the approach to environmental security in the sense of taking into consideration the rights and interests of women as more common victims of negative environmental influences along with their potentials as significant stake holders in this field.

Holy and Zeman (2021) ,in their research, present the case study of the SHE (Sibenik Hub ~ for Ecology) hub project, ecofeminist business practice in Croatia. The first part is theoretical and gives a summary of related literature regarding corporate social responsibility, ecological development, and green consumerism and ecofeminism. The second part is a case study of the SHE hub project, based on examination of the project website, content analysis of the coverage of the media concerning the project and a thorough interview with project motivator.

The review of literature presented in this paper sheds the light on the movement of ecofeminism. It discusses different previous ideas concerning this movement. This gives the researcher the opportunity to explain his ideas that will add to the previous studies.

Discussion

In the heat of a historical moment when the inserted nature of imperialism, exploitation of workers, racism, ecological degradation, and women's oppression is painfully clear to many, ecofeminism appears to be gaining in popularity (Cuomo, 2002). Warren gives a very broad definitions of ecofeminism which is it "is a term that encompasses many different viewpoints which are rooted in the different feminist practices and philosophies. All these perspectives do not only reflect the different feminist perspectives... but also the different understandings of nature and solutions to the growing environmental problems" (Warren, 1987, pp.3–20). The main principle of ecofeminism is that "ideology which authorizes oppressions, based on race, gender, class, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature" (Gaard, 1993, pp. 1–2). That patriarchal background is present in relations and performance to nature in the similar way as it is leading attitude in communication with women. Consequently, ecofeminism is not the environmental movement which is strictly feminine because of the women who lead it or participate in it, but because of its basic similarities between the status of women and nature in the modern world. (Coric, 2014)

That is why, ecofeminism links the theory and practice of environmentalism and feminism. It is a mixture of feminist and ecological movements that shares their mutual political and social concerns about the treatment of women and nature of capitalist industrialized societies. It goes beyond these two movements (environmentalism and feminism) because its aim is to use the principles of feminism and environment in encouraging social and green fairness and improving a new relationship that would offer equal opportunity to all humans and nature alike. Early ecofeminism generally centered on the biological resemblances of women and the Earth's reproductive ability and accordingly provided an essentialist clarification of the mistreatment of both of capitalist industrialized societies. By 1990, nevertheless, ecofeminism had advanced into a diverse and a sophisticated intellectual discourse and political movement that reinforced environmental and women's rights, green consciousness, social justice, and social activism in some developing countries and the West.

As a result, ecofeminism can be defined as a value system, a social movement, and a practice... (which) also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism ((male-centeredness) and environmental destruction. It is an “awareness” that initiates with the recognition that the abuse of nature is closely related to the attitude of Western Man to women and tribal cultures. (Birkeland, 1993, p. 18). Within the patriarchal conceptual outline, all those features connected with masculinity are given higher prominence or prestige than those connected with femininity, resulting in ‘hierarchical dualisms’ (Warren 1987, pp. 6-8). This means that all ecofeminists are of the opinion that what justifies the twin domination of women and nature is the “logic of domination”, linked with value-hierarchical thinking and value-dualisms (Warren 1990). Therefore, the domination of women and nature is basically rooted in ideology for ecofeminists. One needs to reconstruct and reconceptualize the underlying patriarchal values and structural relations of one’s culture and encourage equality, non-violence, non-hierarchical forms of organization to bring about new social forms to overcome such domination. Ecofeminists believe that one also needs to realize the interconnectedness of all life procedures and henceforth respect nature and all forms of life. Humans should work along with nature and must try to move beyond power-based relationships, but not try to control nature. This would mean integrating the dualisms on the separation of the male and the female in one’s conception of reality. The ecofeminists argue that importance should also be given to the process rather than only to the goal. The personal is political, and hence the female private sphere is just as applicable and main to the male public sphere. One desires to alter the nature of the patriarchy of the system by removing power and energy from patriarchy (Gaard 1993, pp. 16-20). Ecofeminist theory has brought into sharp focus the relations between gender and development. It has emphasized the fact that what happened of violence against nature and against women is built into the dominant development model.

Karen Warren (Warren, 2000, p. 34) discovers that ecofeminism has its origins in all areas of feminism. She asserts that more women than men in the developing countries rely on the nature and its resources, mainly on the trees and fruits. Women are the primary victims of environmental degradation, and particularly the destruction of forests. Moreover, women are faced with customs and taboos which are not known to men. Thus, Warren believes that “trees, forests and forestry in particular are ‘women’s matter’ for conceptual reasons” (Warren, 1991). For instance, “The appearance of Chipko” movement (Jain, 2000) in India arose from the protection of trees, namely “hugging” the trees order to prevent their cutting. Also, there is Love Canal movement named after the area in the vicinity of Niagara Falls which in the 1970s suffered ecological disaster due to leakage of toxic waste. Green belt movement was also founded in the 1970s in order to help rural women in Kenya to preserve woods and soils. This means that the image of female liberation, social inequalities and, finally, social justice connected with the confirmation of degraded areas and inferior non-human nature. Subsequently, the spread of ecofeminist ethics is a spread of freedom from the dualisms of Western intellectual thought and male-gender bias about women and nature. (Buzov, 2007, pp. 1–16).

Ecofeminist philosophy is in a lot of ways one that is attempting to look for "another side" of what mainstream philosophy takes for granted. To achieve this, ecofeminist philosophy draws on feminism, environmentalism, ecology and of course on philosophy. It analyses the human systems of domination. It assumes that such domination is neither justified, nor expected. As a feminism, ecofeminism uses gender analysis as the initial point to criticize domination. As an ecological and environmental position, it uses insights about the non-human world and human interaction. As a philosophy, it describes the meaning of key concepts, and makes analysis of arguments for the domination of women-Others-nature, and their soundness. Not only is ecofeminism not limited to describe reality and report facts; but also it also involves encouraging strategies and recommending solutions. Thus, it is also prescriptive. (Warren, 2000, p. 43).

This means that ecofeminism is a theory that has developed from many fields of feminist activism and inquiry: labor movements, peace movements, women’s healthcare, and the anti-nuclear, environmental, and animal liberation movements. According to the visions of ecology, feminism and socialism, eco-feminism’s main evidence is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on class, gender, race, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which supports the oppression of nature. Therefore, the main concern of ecofeminism is to end all oppressions, arguing that no trial to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be fruitful with-out an equal attempt to free nature. (Gaard, 1993)

On every occasion women criticized the destruction of ecology, danger of atomic destruction of life on earth, new expansions in reproductive technology, biotechnology, and genetic engineering, they realized the link between violence against women, the colonized non-western, non-White peoples and patriarchal domination and nature. It led to the fact that the liberty of women cannot be achieved in isolation from nature and life on this earth. This is clear in what Karen Warren

(1987) mentions that “Ecofeminism builds on the multiple perspectives of those whose perspectives are typically omitted or undervalued in dominant discourses (Datar, 2011).

Although ecofeminism has a lot of reasons to be vital and important. , there are disagreements about it. Various feminist scholars, such as Janet Biehl (1991), Meera Nanda (1991) Bina Agarwal (1992) and Cecile Jackson (1993) have pointed out, this ecofeminist perspective is “ethnocentric, essentialist, blind to class, ethnicity and other differentiating cleavages, ahistorical and the material sphere” (Jackson 1993, p. 398).

Ecofeminism depicts domination of women and nature as going hand in hand, and both are realized as victims of development. It is taken as a fact that any damage to nature damages women similarly, because women are seen as closer to nature than men. None of the ecofeminist literature tries to create this connection through real evidence or strong argument. It is very subjective and takes its position as undeniable. It finds the domination of women and nature mainly in ideology, thereby neglecting the “interrelated material sources of dominance based on economic advantage and political power” (Agarwal 1992, p. 122) as well as the gender division of labor and distribution of opportunity. These ecofeminist images of women, in fact “retain the patriarchal stereotypes of what men expect women to be. “(They)...freeze women as merely caring and nurturing beings instead of expanding the full range of women’s human potentialities and abilities” (Biehl 1991, p. 15). “The use of metaphors of women as ‘nurturing’ – like the earth, and of the earth as female abound are regressive rather than liberating women” (Biehl 1991, pp. 17-19). They only strengthen stereotypes.

What these arguments appear to overlook is that concepts of nature, culture and gender are “historically and socially constructed and vary across and within cultures and time periods” (Agarwal, 1992, p. 123). This essentialism presents women as a similar category, both within countries and across nations. It “fails to differentiate among women by class, race, ethnicity and so on” (Agarwal, 1992, p. 122).

Ecofeminist essentialism fails to put forward any account of historical change in society. Critics like Susan Prentice (1998) claim that stressing on the special connection of women with nature and politics indicate that what men do to the earth is not good, unlike women, thereby ignoring the fact that men too can develop an ethic of caring for nature. It also fails to analyse capitalism and its domination of nature. Therefore, it cannot advance a real strategy for change, since it finishes in polarizing the worlds of men and women while essentializing the two categories. On the other hand, ecofeminists working within the socialist framework, look upon nature and human nature as “socially constructed, rooted in an analysis of race, class and gender” (Merchant 1992, p. 194). It has the potential for a more thorough critique of the domination issue. Going beyond the radicals, this ecofeminism puts forward a critique of capitalist patriarchy, focusing on the dialectical relationships between “production and reproduction, and between production and ecology” (Merchant 1992, pp. 195-197).

Historically, women’s close knowledge of nature has helped to bear life. With capitalist development and colonial intervention, production in traditional societies was interrupted. It resulted in a capitalistic economy controlled by men in charge of production of exchange commodities, while women were pushed increasingly into the domestic sphere, responsible essentially for reproducing the work-force and social relations. Under the capitalistic system, reproduction is subordinate to production, and the sustainability of nature is ignored. Under socialism; nevertheless, production is to achieve satisfaction for people’s need, not people’s greed. According to this ecofeminist view, in the transition to socialist ecology, the main concern of capitalism would be reversed with emphasis on reproduction and nature, rather than production being central. Consequently, reproduction of life itself becomes the focus of these ecofeminists. This view deals principally with environmental issues that affect working class women. However, these ecofeminists too tend to essentialize women and perceive them as being closer to nature. Besides, they tend to see women as one of the marginalized categories along with the different marginalized races and classes. But in doing so, they homogenize the category of women. They fail to see that the experiences of women differ on the basis of their caste, class, race, and ethnicity and so on. Despite these limitations, the ecofeminists working within the socialist framework have much more potential than the other two ecofeminist perspectives, in analyzing the link between gender and environment.

Another negative element of ecofeminism is that it is not made available to a wider audience of readers, because much of the texts (eg. Val Plumwood), is written in very academic language, usually only clear to a very small exclusive circles of academic audiences. If we are to see a major paradigm shift in the way we currently view the world, we will need the wisdom, knowledge and experience of ecofeminism communicated to a much larger audience.

Another defect of ecofeminism that it seems largely dominated by educated, middle-class, western women. What would ecofeminism look like if it had grown out of the Third World? Having said that, Vandana Shiva, who speaks strongly from

the perspective of a woman of the Third World, says that, “Third World women are bringing the concern with living survival back to centre-stage in human history.... they are laying the foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society, and through it the recovery of the earth as sustainer and provider”. I think that more voices from Third World women would add more strength and importance to ecofeminism.

Despite the defects of ecofeminism, it still remains one of the most encouraging movements within radical environmental thought. It can be said that ecofeminism brings new energy and a bit fresh, different view on environmental problems and their resolving. Ecofeminism gives the true importance to the roles of women and nature.

Conclusion

One of the merits of ecofeminism is that women and nature are connected in several different ways: with their biological status, reproductive role, discrimination. Accordingly, ecofeminism stands for one of the central theoretical, philosophical and even practical ways of resolving the problems of the environment. The representatives of this thinking find that changing positions and behaviors by leaving the patriarchal approach to everything – to the women and to the nature, can end the environmental degradation.

Ecofeminism claims to eliminate patriarchy, highlights the role of women experience in the movement of ecology, and focuses on that ecological movement should closely connect with regional and global women liberation movements to realize women's liberation; ecofeminism pays attention to the difference and diversity, adheres to actively absorb the latest achievements of ecological theory in addition to feminist principles, and combines with regional and global ecological movements, makes great efforts to resolve ecological crisis, and reconstructs a new relationship between people and nature, people and people, and people and society.

In spite of the weaknesses of ecofeminism, it still remains one of the most promising movements within radical environmental thought. Ecofeminism has the capacity to transcend its difficulties: the dependence on women's biological functions to create a connection between women and nature, the uncritical over privileging of women's experiences, the incorrectness of designating ideal female characteristics, and the regressive political effects of linking women with nature.

By valuing women, people, and the nonhuman world, asserting an extensive conception of knowledge that embraces good science along with the knowledge that emerges from experience, culture, and creativity, ecofeminism is not only a critique of domination, but also It is the knowledge we need here and now. Ecofeminism adds a lot to the theory of feminism and empowers woman, although it has some sort of defects. In a word, ecofeminism is a bliss and not a curse.

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"هل الحركة النسوية البيئية نعمة أم نقمة ؟ دراسة نقدية"

وتعرف النسوية البيئية بأنها مصطلح يتضمن وجهات نظر بيئية عميقة متأصلة في الممارسات النسائية المختلفة التي لا تعكس فقط وجهات النظر النسوية المختلفة ، ولكن تعكس فهم أكثر لتزايد الصعوبات البيئية. وتعتبر النسوية البيئية حركة بيئية وذلك بسبب وجود تشابه بينها في العالم الحديث وبين الوضع الحالي للمرأة والطبيعة. ويؤيد البعض أهمية تلك الحركة وفعاليتها، بينما آخرون يتجاهلون ذلك ويعارضوها. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى وصف النسوية البيئية، وتتبع تاريخها، وشرح الغرض منها، وذلك للاستنتاج أن مزاياها هي أكثر من عيوبها مما يتضح من ذلك أنها تعتبر بمثابة نعمة وليست بنقمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحركة النسوية البيئية، الطبيعة، المرأة، المزايا، العيوب