

Ecofeminism and Empowerment: Towards Social and Environmental Justice and the MORE Project

Ecofemminismo ed empowerment: Verso la giustizia sociale e ambientale e il Progetto MORE

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DOUBLE BLIND PEER REVIEW

ABSTRACT

The article reviews ecofeminism in terms of a critical approach articulating the intersection between social justice and environmental sustainability, discussing its historical roots and theoretical evolution. In the context of contemporary challenges at the intersection of gender and ecology, ecofeminism is presented as a call to action to transform oppressive dynamics. The case study of the MORE Latin America Project highlights the role of education and empowerment as effective strategies for cultivating ecological awareness among Spanish-speaking women and youth. Through training and dialogue initiatives, the project promotes the empowerment of participants, highlighting their crucial role in environmental management. The article emphasises the need for an integrative approach to address gender inequalities and to enable a sustainable future, highlighting the relevance of ecofeminism in formulating inclusive solutions and building a more just and equitable world.

KEYWORDS

Ecofeminism, Empowerment, Education, Gender Equality, More.
Ecofemminismo, Empowerment, Educazione, Dialogo decologico, Uguaglianza di genere.

L'articolo affronta l'ecofemminismo in quanto approccio critico in grado di favorire l'intersezione tra giustizia sociale e sostenibilità ambientale, e ne analizza le radici storiche e l'evoluzione teorica. Nel contesto delle sfide contemporanee legate all'integrazione tra genere ed ecologia, l'ecofemminismo si presenta come una chiamata all'azione volta a trasformare le dinamiche di oppressione. Il caso di studio del progetto MORE Latinoamerica sottolinea il ruolo dell'educazione e dell'empowerment come strategie efficaci per la formazione di una coscienza ecologica tra le donne e i giovani di lingua spagnola. Mediante iniziative di formazione e dialogo, il progetto promuove l'empowerment delle partecipanti, evidenziando il loro ruolo cruciale nella gestione dell'ambiente. L'articolo sottolinea la necessità di un approccio integrato per affrontare le disuguaglianze di genere e consentire un futuro sostenibile, evidenziando la rilevanza dell'ecofemminismo nella formulazione di soluzioni inclusive e nella costruzione di un mondo più giusto ed equo.

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1. Introduction

The ecofeminist movement offers a critical and regenerative perspective that links struggles for social and environmental justice, examining the complex dynamics of domination that impose social and environmental injustices on women and ecosystems. In response to escalating global socio-environmental crises, this theoretical framework calls for a profound reconsideration of the interrelationships between gender, ecology, and power (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Analyzing the historical roots and evolution of ecofeminist thought makes it evident that environmental issues cannot be understood without addressing the gender structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression (Navarro Trujillo, Gutiérrez Aguilar, 2018).

Alicia Puleo has played a significant role in increasing ecofeminism's visibility among Spanish-speaking audiences. Her work is essential in this field, particularly in her critique of essentialist interpretations of ecofeminism. Puleo proposes restructuring narratives that link women to nature, advocating for a more nuanced and complex vision of these dynamics.

This paper explores how ecofeminism, when integrating education and empowerment, can become a key tool in addressing the challenges at the intersection of gender and the environment. It will examine the impact of the MORE Project and its contribution to global female empowerment, emphasizing the importance of an integrative approach that responds to both present and future urgencies. MORE Latin America stands out as an emblematic case of how education can be used as an empowerment tool for women and youth, fostering ecological awareness that is vital for sustainable development. Although MORE's training programs do not solely aim to equip participants with skills but also to encourage an ecological dialogue that recognizes the interdependence of all life forms and the need to build a fairer and more equitable future, the MORE Latin America Project exemplifies how education can serve as a vehicle for women's and youth empowerment, promoting ecological awareness as a critical element of sustainable development.

2. Ecofeminism: Interconnections Between Human and Natural

Historical Roots

Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s in response to growing environmental concerns and their disproportionate impact on women and children, particularly in Europe and North America. Ecofeminist scholars and activists began highlighting the "woman-nature" relationship, conceptualizing the connection between gender oppression and environmental degradation (Sakman, 2007), he argued that the domination and exploitation of nature were closely linked to the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. In this specific study, Val Plumwood's (2000) critique of Murray Bookchin's interpretation of social and ecological challenges is examined. Plumwood considers Bookchin's analysis overly simplistic, she argues that his hierarchical view of oppression fails to capture the intricate interrelations between these issues. They suggest that environmental degradation and violence against women are intrinsically linked, both being manifestations of a system of power and control (Plumwood, 2000). Ecofeminism should promote a genuinely systemic approach, recognizing both human and non-human nature as interconnected elements within a web of life that depends on an understanding of interdependence and responsibility. In this sense, ecofeminism calls for an attitude of mutualism and respect, where nature both provides care and receives care equally from all its participants.

The Historical Priority Theory of Bookchin and Its Critique

Bookchin's theory of historical priority is called into question, which affects his concept of strategic priority. Eliminating social domination would not automatically eliminate violence against nature. Ecofeminist theories have significantly contributed to the debate on the interconnections between feminism and ecology. Their theoretical frameworks have highlighted how the division between nature and culture, forged by modern Western thought, has fostered both the marginalization of women and the degradation of the environment (Shiva & Mies, 2014). From this perspective, the emancipation of women and environmental sustainability are viewed as interdependent goals. Although deep ecologists sense the need to break away from this tradition, their monistic approach, which exalts wild nature, places them in a dangerous position, leading them to adopt stances that may be racist and sexist (Álvarez, 2007).

From another perspective, social ecology, by positing that the domination of nature stems from the domination of human beings, overlooks the depth and ambiguity of environmental issues and proposes a change merely in social relations (Sarmiento, 2023). Critics also point to the lack of consideration for the diversity of women's experiences and perspectives, warning against reductionist generalizations. Through its critique of dominant patriarchal and ecological models, the ecofeminist movement has gained great relevance as a current of thought and action that challenges systems of domination (Segato, 2016). The great contribution of ecofeminist philosophy lies in its ability to capture the conceptual and logical interconnection between various forms of human domination

and the domination exercised over nature. Gaard (2020) asserts that “at the root of ecofeminism is the understanding that the many systems of oppression reinforce each other”. This philosophical approach allows ecofeminists to go beyond identifying historical and empirical parallels, pushing them to conduct a deeper analysis of the interrelations between the oppression of women, racism, classism, and the oppressive structures within environmentalism and naturism.

Ecofeminist Pedagogy and the Critique of Oppression Structures

Karen Warren's contribution has facilitated the development of an ecofeminist pedagogy committed to overcoming oppressive structures. Warren (1990) emphasizes the relevance of a «conceptual framework» that not only explains but also justifies domination. Warren argues that education should be a space for transformation where power hierarchies are questioned and reconfigured, promoting an inclusive approach that recognizes the diversity of women's and nature's perspectives. This perspective not only fosters a more holistic understanding of the interconnection between gender and ecology but also empowers students to become agents of change in the defense of women's rights and environmental justice. Val Plumwood (1993) contributes with her educational proposal, which is based on the need to dismantle the artificial divisions created between reason and nature, promoting a pedagogy that values interdependence and the human-environment relationship. Under her perspective, Plumwood invites us to rethink the way we teach and understand the world, while promoting an approach that recognizes the inextricable connection among all living beings and the urgency of an ethics that supports environmental and social responsibility.

3. Contemporary Environmental and Gender Challenges

The emergence of the contemporary socio-environmental crisis poses significant challenges for both feminism and the environmental movement, making it one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century. The contributions of philosopher Alicia Puleo, a key figure in constructivist ecofeminism in Ibero-America, are essential to feminist theory and gender studies. Puleo has helped elevate the relevance of ecofeminism in the Spanish-speaking world, distancing herself from the essentialist version that has gained popularity but faced criticism from many feminist thinkers. They argue that it risks reverting to the notion of the “natural woman.” Puleo contends that mythological figures like Gaia and Artemis are not the key to addressing the current environmental situation and proposes a “new Ariadne” rooted in the union of feminism and ecology (Fuentes, 2019). The first feminist initiative emerged in Paris, France. Simone de Beauvoir had already presented her feminist ideas after publishing her book “Feminism or Death” in 1974. In 1978, the Ecology and Feminism movement was also created as a form of opposition to communalism (Flores, Trevisan, 2015). François d'Eaubonne was the first to coin the term “ecofeminism” to refer to the connection between overpopulation, environmental degradation, and the decline of masculinity. She questioned the role of genders in production and consumption. In this context, she challenged women's rights, such as the right to control reproduction, which emerged before population concerns, and argued that the male-centered model would be ecologically unsustainable.

Out of sheer necessity for survival, the current way of life should be replaced by one that is more sustainable and environmentally friendly, as recognized throughout this work (Puleo, 2000). The need for transformation stems from growing awareness of the severe environmental and social issues caused by the prevailing development paradigm, rooted in the “irrational exploitation” of natural resources and an “androcentric and patriarchal” view of the relationship between humans and nature. In this same context, in the United States, Mary Daly was a pioneer in addressing the concept of “feminization” as a fundamental critique of patriarchal thinking and social organization. In her philosophical and theological works, she questioned the assumptions of classical “rural feminism” and advocated for an alternative that innovatively integrated ecological concerns with Christian beliefs (Hedrick, 2013, pp. 257-260). Daly's teachings, along with those of other feminist authors of her time, laid the groundwork for better integration of ecological and gender issues, paving the way for reforms in progress paradigms and the creation of sustainable, solidarity-based social systems.

Constructivist ecofeminism, which has developed in recent decades, proposes that differences between men and women are primarily social constructs rather than biological determinants. In this direction, modern ecofeminist theories address the environmental crisis with a more critical approach, incorporating the concept of the «Anthropocene» and analyzing the impact of technologization and industrialization on life on Earth (Martínez Alier, 2004).

Ecofeminism's critical stance toward anthropocentrism is also fundamental for understanding the relationship between humans and the natural world. Unlike ecological feminism, which may focus on resource management from a utilitarian perspective, ecofeminism advocates for a reevaluation of humanity's status in relation to other living beings, promoting a more holistic vision that recognizes the interdependence of all forms of life (Puleo, 2019).

Much of this critical awareness forms the basis for addressing environmental challenges, including global warming, biodiversity loss, and the pollution of natural resources. Ecofeminism not only promotes the analysis of gender and the environment from a theoretical perspective but also proposes a practical and moral approach to solutions through collective efforts.

4. Case Study: MORE Latinoamérica's Certificate Course in Youth Leadership and Women's Empowerment

In the context of escalating gender inequity and environmental degradation, MORE Latinoamérica has emerged as an innovative force in global education and social transformation. Launched in 2019 and officially registered in 2020 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in the United States, MORE Latinoamérica has established itself as a dynamic virtual platform dedicated to fostering holistic development among underprivileged Spanish-speaking women and youth. One of its flagship initiatives—the Certificate Course in Youth Leadership—exemplifies the project's commitment to integrating ecofeminist principles with practical leadership training.

Program Overview and Objectives

The Certificate Course in Youth Leadership is a comprehensive training program designed to equip young leaders with the necessary tools to drive social and environmental change in their communities. Its curriculum is deeply rooted in the core tenets of ecofeminism, which highlight the intrinsic link between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. By simultaneously addressing gender and environmental justice, the program aims to cultivate a new generation of leaders who are adept at navigating complex social dynamics and committed to sustainable practices.

Key objectives of the program include:

- Empowerment through Education: Delivering advanced skills in leadership, critical thinking, and community organizing to participants.
- Holistic Development: Integrating modules on mindfulness, resilience, equity, and technology to foster personal and professional growth.
- Intersectional Approach: Emphasizing how gender, class, ethnicity, and environmental issues intersect, thus preparing participants to address multifaceted societal challenges.
- Community Impact: Inspiring graduates to become active agents of change, capable of launching local and global initiatives that promote social and environmental sustainability.

Curriculum and Methodology

The course employs a blended learning model that combines online lectures, interactive workshops, and hands-on project assignments. This model facilitates a rich exchange of ideas among participants from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The curriculum covers a wide array of topics, including:

- Leadership and Advocacy: Courses that focus on strategic leadership, ethical decision-making, and effective advocacy tailored for today's socio-environmental challenges.
- Mindfulness and Resilience: Sessions designed to cultivate inner strength and adaptability, ensuring that emerging leaders can sustain their efforts even in the face of adversity.
- Equity and Inclusion: Workshops exploring power dynamics, privilege, and oppression, while offering practical strategies for fostering social justice.
- Technology and Innovation: Training on leveraging digital tools and innovative practices to drive community change and enhance connectivity.

Impact and Future Directions

Since its inception, the Certificate Course in Youth Leadership has empowered a growing network of young leaders who actively contribute to the transformation of their communities. Graduates have initiated local projects addressing issues ranging from environmental conservation to combating gender-based violence, clearly demonstrating the tangible impact of an education rooted in ecofeminist principles.

MORE Latinoamérica's approach underscores the belief that sustainable development and social equity are deeply interconnected. By investing in the empowerment of youth through comprehensive education, the project not only nurtures individual growth but also strengthens the collective capacity to drive systemic change. This initiative serves as a compelling example of how targeted educational programs can create ripple effects, ultimately contributing to a more just, resilient, and environmentally conscious society.

Looking ahead, MORE Latinoamérica aims to expand the Certificate Course in Youth Leadership to reach a broader audience, reinforcing its commitment to an inclusive vision of empowerment. By ensuring that both

women and men actively participate in the construction of a sustainable future, the program continues to champion the integrated pursuit of gender equity, social justice, and environmental sustainability.

5. Conclusions

The ecofeminist approach stands as an essential framework for exploring the complex interconnections between gender, the environment, and social justice in contemporary society. As evidenced throughout this article, the critical perspective of ecofeminism not only questions the structures of domination that affect both women and nature but also offers integrative solutions that promote empowerment and education as fundamental strategies to address the current socio-environmental crisis.

The MORE Latinoamérica Project has demonstrated that training and ecological dialogue can transform lives and communities, empowering Spanish-speaking women and youth to act as agents of change. The dissemination of this knowledge and these practices through research not only contributes to gender equity but also fosters a critical ecological awareness for sustainable development.

Spreading this knowledge and these practices through research is crucial for generating a significant impact on society. We extend our gratitude to MORE for its commitment and effort in promoting women's empowerment and environmental sustainability. By adopting ecofeminism on the global agenda, we pave the way for a more just and sustainable future, where all voices are valued and considered, thereby creating a more equitable world for future generations.

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