

The political economy of ecofeminist degrowth

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Abstract

Socio-ecological crises pose numerous problems for the continuity of human communities and more-than-human beings. First, previous thinkers have shown how capitalism and continuous economic growth are tightly linked, which has led to overproduction and overconsumption. Second, ecofeminists point out that not everyone is responsible for these crises. Furthermore, dualist and hierarchical mindsets maintain the exploitation of women, minorities, and more-than-human beings. Bridging these two debates is important to dismantling gendered economic exploitation on the one hand and the capitalist growth economy on the other. This text briefly introduces the history of ecofeminism and the ecofeminist political economy. It also identifies themes in ecofeminist degrowth thinking by analysing the works of Ariel Salleh and Stefania Barca. It is important to highlight ecofeminist thinking so that current degrowth debates do not ignore the institutionalised exploitation of women, minorities, and other species in economic activity.

Introduction

Intertwined socio-ecological crises, such as global warming, biodiversity loss, and the crisis of care, pose numerous problems for the human communities and more-than-human beings. The root causes are matters of political economy. Degrowth thinkers argue that continuous economic growth in capitalism has led to overproduction and overconsumption (Muraca 2012; Kallis et al. 2012). However, ecofeminists point out that not all humans are responsible for these crises but suffer from them since dualist and hierarchical mindsets perpetuate institutional exploitation of, for example, women, ethnic minorities, and more-than-human beings (MacGregor 2017; Warren 2000).

Linking ecofeminist and degrowth debates is important for dismantling gendered economic exploitation and the capitalist growth economy. To generate potential solutions, it is important to bring together ecofeminist and degrowth thinking and challenge conventional ways of thinking about the economy, nature, and agency. However, ecofeminist thinking, such as feminist criticism of the environmental movement, have been mostly ignored when creating the canon of the environmental movement in the United States (Sturgeon 1997). A similar disregard of earlier ecofeminist thinking is also evident in the field of degrowth (Gregoratti and Raphael 2019).

The aim of this review is to present examples of ecofeminist degrowth thinking, which as a concept combines feminist degrowth thinking and an ecofeminist political economy. First, I briefly outline the history of ecofeminism, ecofeminist political economy, and degrowth thinking. Second, I identify themes of ecofeminist political economy in Ariel Salleh's book *Ecofeminism as politics: nature, Marx, and the postmodern* (1997/2017) and Stefania Barca's book *Forces of reproduction: notes for a counter-hegemonic Anthropocene* (2020). Barca and Salleh have both written actively on ecofeminism and political economy elsewhere (see e.g. Barca 2019; Salleh 2009). They have participated in degrowth conferences and in the *Feminism(s) and Degrowth Alliance* (FaDA).

My motive for this text is also practical, because as a scholar-activist I want to clarify the political economy of ecofeminist degrowth. I have been involved in the Finnish Degrowth movement (*Kohtuusliike*) and the coordination group of FaDA, where I have facilitated discussions on topics such as eco-fascism, care income, and being involved in drafting a position paper on the importance of care during a pandemic (FaDA 2020). Since 2020, I have gained new perspectives to degrowth research since co-founding *Degrowth*, an open access research journal.

Ecofeminism in brief

Gender and the environment as a field brings together both environmental and gender studies, which as separate strands emerged in the Western thought from the 1960s onwards (MacGregor 2017, 2). In general, the field of gender and the environment is broad, including a variety of orientations such as feminist science and technology studies, ecological feminism, materialist feminism, and ecofeminism (ibid., 7-8). In this text, I focus on ecofeminism, which brings together a wide range of activism and thinking, particularly on issues related to political economy.

Ecofeminism includes activism, direct action, and academic work, all of which have influenced one other. Academics have taken part in social movements and direct action, while activists have developed new concepts and highlight silenced perspectives (Sturgeon 1997). There are excellent overviews of ecofeminism available, for example, on ecofeminist philosophy (Warren 2000) or ecofeminist direct action, politics, and academic research (Sturgeon 1997). The authors remind that their ecofeminist accounts are written from a Western perspective. Writers on ecofeminism in the Global South include Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (2014) and Bina Agarwal (1992; 1998).

Economist Bina Agarwal (1992) wrote already in the 1990s about the material link between gender and nature. According to her, feminist environmental thinking must consider the diverse

impact of environmental problems on people depending on their gender and socio-economic status. Almost 30 years later, Agarwal pointed out in a conference talk that the interface between ecological economics and feminist economics remains insufficient (ISEE & Degrowth Conference 2021).

Ecofeminism combines the traditions of feminist and environmental thinking. On the one hand, ecofeminists have presented a feminist critique of environmentalism and direct action, while on the other hand they have also demonstrated the scarcity of environmentalism in feminism (Sturgeon 1997). Karen Warren (after Sturgeon 1997, 46) presents the following minimal criteria that unite ecofeminist thinking. First, the thinking shows important links between women and the oppression of nature. Second, understanding these links is important for understanding the oppression of women and nature. Third, feminist theory and action should incorporate ecological thinking. Fourth, solutions to ecological problems should include feminist perspectives. A particular merit of ecofeminism is how it demonstrates the more-than-human exploitation of nature, other species, women, and minority groups based on dualistic and hierarchical thinking (Warren 2000; Sturgeon 1997).

Ecofeminism, broadly understood, is concerned with abuses of power that unjustifiably subjugate others, such as women, other species, or ecosystems. Ecofeminist philosophy identifies at least five ways of thinking and acting about subordination (Warren 2000, 46-48). First, hierarchical thinking values something as superior to another. For example, 'man' and 'culture' are superior to 'woman' and 'nature'. Second, things are given opposite values and thus dualisms are encouraged. Attributes are seen as exclusive rather than permissive and as opposing rather than complementary. For example, 'white', 'masculinity', 'rational' and 'culture' exclude 'colour', 'femininity', 'emotional' and 'nature', making former categories more tempting.

Third, power is exercised over others, often from the top down, rather than with others. While some is legitimate use of power, not all is. In particular, the use of power is problematic when it

enables the oppression of those in a lower position. Fourth, privilege is seen as belonging to those in a higher position, and this position is actively maintained. Sometimes, some privileges are given to the inferior in order not to challenge the distribution of privileges. Fifth, the whole system is justified by the logic of supremacy, where superiority is used for justifying the subordination. The superior position is determined by certain characteristics, such as rationality or whiteness, which are not considered to be possessed by the inferior or their representatives.

Despite these principles, ecofeminism is not a unanimous field. Noël Sturgeon (1997, 28-29) identifies five approaches, of which at least the second and fourth are in apparent contradiction. The first approach holds that patriarchy regards women and nature as equal - that is, as less valuable than men and culture. In this case, women and nature are understood as an inexhaustible resource to be exploited for economic gain (Ok-sala 2018). Therefore, feminist analysis must take environmental issues into account. The second approach is like the first, since it also requires environmental studies to understand the subordinate position of women: the superiority of men's culture over women's culture and nature effectively oppresses women, non-men, and more-than-human beings. The emancipation of women is particularly dangerous because it challenges the notion of the other species as a passive and immaterial entity that can be endlessly treated as an object. In the third approach, women and nature have a special relationship, because in different times and cultures women have been responsible for domestic, agricultural and care work, and thus environmental problems are first reflected in their work and lives.

In the fourth approach, women are thought to be biologically closer to nature than men, as women reproduce humanity through their bodies and work, including childbirth, breastfeeding, and nursing. In addition, menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth are thought to bring women closer to natural rhythms and life-and-death issues, which also makes them more compassionate towards more-than-human nature. The fifth approach focuses on feminist spirituality, which draws on nature-based

religions such as paganism, witchcraft, goddess worship and indigenous worldviews, all of which place female deities either in the main or on an equal footing with male deities.

Sturgeon (1997) and others who have followed her have analysed the tensions between these positions and how ecofeminism also risks producing hierarchical and dualistic thinking between different tendencies and their practitioners. Some (eco)feminists see the idea of femininity as more directly linked to nature as damaging, as it risks essentialising femininity and justifying the continuation of oppression based on femininity. Critics of a more direct link often represent academic (eco)feminism, while those who advocate a link operate outside the academy. Understanding the links between gender and more-than-human nature is intertwined with issues such as global justice and class.

The political economy of degrowth

Degrowth is a movement of diverse actors questioning the ideological position of the growth economy in culture, politics, and economics. Activists, thinkers, and researchers are calling for a holistic cultural change that places human and more-than-human well-being at the top of the political agenda – instead of economic efficiency, pseudo-development, and the growth economy (Muraca 2012; Kallis et al. 2020). The political economy of degrowth is not a technical calculation of overproduction and overconsumption, but rather it invites to consider social, historical, and local differences in organising social life (Barca et al. 2019, 2).

The complex question of post-growth societies requires analysing the political economy of degrowth. In general, the political economy of degrowth aims at holistic change (Buch-Hansen 2018). Most degrowth thinkers reject the emphasis on consumption, labour, and individualism that underlies in many economic theories. These perspectives invite a notion of a monolithic economy and tend to result in processes of commodification of life (Barca et al. 2019, 4). Instead, degrowth is considered as plural, and the commercialisation

of different aspects of life is resisted. This heterodox orientation has enabled the adoption of grassroots ideas and the theoretical development of different ideas. However, it is precisely the diversity of the political economy of degrowth that can prevent the diffusion of these perspectives into policymaking (Paulson 2017).

In just over a decade, the critique of economic growth has shifted from activist meetings to high-profile events on sustainable development, such as Finland's presidency of the Council of the European Union (Mikola and Saikkonen 2020). Although a slow or postgrowth economy has become more commonly acknowledged, degrowth thinking still has a radical reputation, which is reflected in disparaging or fearful comments in public speech.

Although the degrowth movement aims for a just society, gender is less theorised. Ecofeminism is often mentioned in degrowth texts, but usually only in the conclusions as a potential way forward. In some texts, ecofeminist thinking is seen as a holistic alternative to the capitalist growth economy (see for example Kallis et al. 2012). These references are produced both by feminist degrowth thinkers and those whose familiarity with ecofeminism is not clear. Even when ecofeminism is mentioned, its applications may remain unclear to the reader. For example, it remains uncertain what an ecofeminist political (degrowth) economy is, how it would be achieved, how existing institutions should be changed, and how ecofeminism is manifested beyond the politicisation of care work.

Catia Gregoratti and Riya Raphael (2019) show how the (eco)feminist tradition has remained hidden in degrowth thinking. They highlight the work of Maria Mies and Marilyn Waring, whose relevance to degrowth is obvious but rarely referred to in introductions to degrowth. Mies has done a remarkable job of exploring the multiple subsistence perspectives, and Waring has pioneered in showing how the value of women's and more-than-human being's (care) work is missing from the economic calculations used in policymaking.

In general, gender and care have not received the same attention as just transition programmes, although investments in care and reproductive

work are important for the continuity of societies (Elomäki and Ylöstalo 2020). There is a risk that the importance of gender and care will also be ignored in degrowth thinking. If degrowth thinking considers ecofeminist perspectives and develops thinking based on them, this may increase the attention paid to gender and care in political economy more broadly.

According to Hubert Buch-Hansen (2018, 161-162), the transition to degrowth societies requires four factors: a deep crisis, an alternative political agenda, an inclusive coalition to mainstream the agenda, and (tacit) majority consent. According to Buch-Hansen, the first two elements are already in place but mainstreaming the agenda with majority support is missing. However, in the spirit of Gregoratt and Raphael (2019), one can ask how a limited knowledge of (eco)feminist (degrowth) thinking affects mainstreaming degrowth and the drive towards ecologically and socially sustainable societies. If a significant part of research on gender and the environment remains hidden or is reduced to a mere care issue (*ibid.*, 95), there is a risk that gendered assumptions will also dominate in degrowth thinking and programmes that seek to win the support of an overall coalition and majority approval.

Ecofeminist political economy

In general, ecofeminists make visible the patriarchal order that predates capitalism, in which nature is understood as feminine and women as natural, among other things. In addition to this representation, ecofeminists produce local understandings of capitalist logics that define a gendered economy and division of labour (Oksala 2018).

An ecofeminist analysis shows how the dominant and supposedly neutral conception of man in economics is fundamentally skewed. According to Mary Mellor (2017), ecofeminist political economy returns to the pre-growth economic traditions, where the economy was analysed as a social activity from more diverse perspectives. In her analysis, Mellor (2017) combines Marxist materialism, ecological economics, and feminist

economics on the gendered division of labour. According to Mellor, the focus on women's work can be labelled as essentialist: there is a risk of attributing certain characteristics to women, and thus reproducing the gendered division of labour. However, she argues that an ecofeminist analysis reveals how women's work is first externalised from economic accounting, but then continuously exploited to sustain the economy. Although women's work maintains the continuity of communities, it is stigmatised as feminine, with a lower status than masculine and, in a capitalist system, profit-seeking work. Moreover, in conceptions that emphasise economic rationality, nature is only considered to have value if it can be counted and resold.

Ecofeminist political economy thus challenges the genderless understanding of the capitalist growth economy and seeks to reject dualisms in all economic thinking (Mellor 2006). Ecofeminist analysis makes visible a two-tiered system in which people must first find paid work to make ends meet (Mellor 2017) – instead, the goal is a one-tier system where people work to satisfy their own needs and those of their community. To achieve a one-tier system, Mellor (2017, 91-97) presents a number of actions. First, instead of the emphasis on exchange value, valuation needs to shift to use value. This is possible when the economy is understood more broadly as subsistence or provisioning, which includes unpaid and paid work that ensures people's wellbeing and satisfies their needs. Second, provisioning needs to include the idea of sufficiency, which aims at an ecologically sustainable life. This is already the case today in the work of small farmers, indigenous peoples, and care workers in some regions.

However, the pursuit of sufficiency should not only lead to self-sufficiency for the wealthy or privileged ones, but communities must be able to provide for children, the elderly, and the sick. Since women have traditionally been left to do this work, it is essential to share the work among all and to pay attention to the bargaining power of women. Third, the democratisation of money would allow for a negotiation on how care is valued. In addition, money should be made communal by increasing

the use of alternative currency systems. Fourth, removing the right of private banks to create money and returning them to lending only against deposits would reduce the pressure to bail out private banks in financial crises with public funds. This would further reduce the need to cut public spending. Overall, the reduction of public expenditure make it particularly difficult for women, children, the elderly, the sick and the poor to make ends meet. Money should be made commons and used, for example, to pay a citizens' wage, allowing people to spend their time on something other than maintaining a two-tier system.

Johanna Oksala (2018) considers it important to update ecofeminist thinking on economic institutions. The first update concerns accounting, for which several ecological commodities have recently been created, such as emissions trading. The creation of ecological commodities means that natural processes taking place despite the capitalist system are commodified by creating an exchange value for them, which can then be incorporated into the system. Consumption by some, often the rich, is made possible by compensating consumption elsewhere, for example by not cutting down forests, often in the poorest countries. According to Oksala, the same logic applies to the unpaid care work of women, which is increasingly being incorporated into the capitalistic wage labour system. However, these new low-paid workers are often poor women from ethnic minorities who leave their countries of origin for work, either voluntarily or as slaves.

Another update proposed by Oksala (2018) makes visible the increasingly intensive incorporation of biological processes into capitalist value creation by consciously modifying processes to make them more productive and competitive or by removing obstacles to them. Biological processes are thus not only commercially exploited but are accelerated by rapidly developing technologies to increase profits, while their environmental risks are downplayed or ignored (Oksala 2018). For example, instead of leaving forests to grow on their own after cutting them, planted trees are fertilised and pesticides are used to improve yields. According to Oksala, these biotechnologies are presented as

effective responses to the ecological crises. The argument of efficiency can be questioned from a degrowth perspective, since more efficient production does not automatically mean less overall consumption. The same efficiency thinking applies to the commercialisation of female fertility technologies, which has led to the emergence of a significant new global market, for example increasing the production of gametes and surrogate mothers (Oksala 2018).

Ecofeminist degrowth thinking in Stefania Barca's and Ariel Salleh's books

When degrowth thinking and ecofeminism independently are less applied concepts in political economy, ecofeminist degrowth thinking is still emerging. Indeed, *ecofeminist degrowth thinking* is rarely used as such, although it is used to bring together feminist degrowth thinking and ecofeminist analysis of the economy.

Next, I focus on two active ecofeminist degrowth thinkers and their work. Stefania Barca, who is based in Europe, has written on labour and just transition and has promoted the care income. Ariel Salleh is from Australia and has worked in universities in South Africa and Germany. Her output, dating to the 1980s, is extensive and she co-founded the scholarly journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. As both have written specifically on issues of political economy, their work is of interest for the purposes of this text. Moreover, they both have a link with the degrowth movement, since they have participated in international degrowth conferences. They both draw from the Marxist tradition, which is reflected in their critique and the references in their publications.

For the remaining of this text, I present themes from two separate books by both thinkers. Barca's 79-page *Forces of reproduction: notes for a counter-hegemonic Anthropocene* from 2020, as its title suggests, deconstructs the totalitarian narrative of the Anthropocene, and highlights human and more-than-human reproductive labour.

The book starts from conflicts in Latin America, where indigenous people defend their remaining multi-species habitats from destruction. Some are paying for this with their lives. Salleh's 369-page *Ecofeminism as politics: nature, Marx, and the postmodern* is a classic in its field, originally published in 1997. It is divided into three parts: Women and ecopolitics, An embodied materialism, and Making postcolonial sense. For this text, I use the commemorative edition published 20 years later, in which Salleh comments on the topicality of the work in a new 15-page introduction (Salleh 2017).

The books differ in length, structure, and time of writing, which makes them complementary. Whereas Barca's *Forces of reproduction* is a long essay on the theme of the book's title, Salleh's *Ecofeminism as politics* presents a wide range of previous research in different fields and builds an argument in a dialectical way. Neither explicitly comments on current academic debates on degrowth, which would also have been more difficult for the 1997 work because the concept was still marginal at the time. Materiality is, however, an essential crosscutting theme in both books. The themes presented below contribute to opening what ecofeminist (degrowth) political economy may be, already discussed one way or another in feminist analyses of the degrowth economy (see e.g. Dengler and Lang 2021; Saave and Muraca 2021; Dengler and Strunk 2018; Paulsson 2017; Paulsson et al. 2023).

A critique of anthropocentrism and androcentrism

Since the ecological crisis is not the same to everyone, it is referred to as a socio-ecological crisis. This is to underline the fact that technological solutions alone are not enough to change the overall consumption of materials and energy, but that cultural change is also needed. In *Forces of reproduction*, Barca deconstructs the apparent way in which emphasising technology has become part of the discourse. She analyses a 3-minute video presented at the 2012 *Rio Earth Summit on*

Environment and Development entitled "Welcome to the Anthropocene", which describes the course of industrial development over the past 250 years. Although the video presents the need to stay within planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009), it addresses humanity as a united group: we have reached peak oil demand, we are producing more and more greenhouse gases and we have created a hole in the ozone layer (Barca 2020, 8). In reality, only a minority of the planet's inhabitants have participated in this activity, even though it has harmed the majority. Therefore, Barca refers to this discourse as the Master's narrative, which represents ecocapitalist realism (ibid., 15).

The Master's narrative ignores colonialism, sexism, class-based discrimination, and speciesism made visible by ecofeminists and other critical thinkers (Barca 2020, 18). When talking about humanity, many unspoken assumptions are often reproduced: the only significant civilization is Western; only Western science, technology and industry have historical agency; social inequalities and the exploitation that results from them are irrelevant; other species do not matter (ibid., 18). Barca (ibid., 59-60) suggests rejecting these assumptions and adopting an ecofeminist historical and materialist analysis.

The subtitle of Salleh's *Ecofeminism as politics* describes the political field to which the work relates: nature, Marx, and the postmodern. Salleh refers several times to Marx's work. She shows that in socialism too the importance of women and more-than-human beings has been hidden, since the focus has been on the oppressed genderless worker (Salleh 2017, 145). Salleh (ibid., 239-240) identifies four ways in which women's relationship to nature, labour and capital differs from men's. Firstly, women's bodies function as birthing and nursing bodies. Secondly, historically these differences have been harnessed for care and tasks that bridge the gap between men and nature. Thirdly, women have been assigned manual labour as farmers, weavers, herbalists, and potters. Fourthly, this has led to symbolic representations that recreate a feminine connection with nature in poetry, paintings, philosophy, and everyday speech. Through these developments,

the work that sustains women's lives has become differentiated from that of men.

Salleh comments the labelling of ecofeminism as essentialist. According to Salleh (2017, 19), women already have an alternative relationship with nature, as called for by activists, which can be used to politically transform social relations. Later, she argues that women do not have an ontologically closer relationship with nature than men do (ibid., 36) and that feminine suffering is universal because it manifests how women and others – such as ethnic minorities, children, animals, plants, rocks, water, and air – are exploited (ibid., 37). In this case, ecofeminists do not claim anything special for themselves, but equal rights for all. Later, Salleh (ibid., 251) draws on Gayatri Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism, in which the dialectical revelation of essentialism makes it possible to make visible the structural relations that determine people's place in society, rather than their psychological characteristics. Salleh (ibid., 251-252) describes this as a political work that benefits from an ecofeminist, materialist analysis.

Examples of eco-feminist material analysis

Material analysis is such a seamless part of Barca's and Salleh's writings that its separation is partly artificial. However, the following examples show more concretely how material analysis has been carried out in the ecofeminist tradition. Val Plumwood, whose work they both refer to, has produced an excellent work on the subject: *Environmental culture: the ecological crisis of reason* (2002).

Barca (2020, 21) shows how earlier material analysis traces the emergence of the capitalist and industrial system to the plantation system of the 16th century, which exploited the global slave trade and resulted in huge monocultures to produce commodities. The modern day Master's narrative attached to the socio-ecological crisis comes too late in this perspective, since many people and other species have already faced

colonial violence for centuries (ibid., 26). As a result, countless people have sought to free themselves from oppression by establishing anti-capitalistic territories and initiatives. The concept of the Anthropocene, which treats humanity as a whole, is racist and colonialist, which encourages decolonial thinking and action in times of ecocrisis (ibid., 20). In a non-critical interpretation of the Anthropocene, the current system would not be changed but the colonial history of the system would be silenced, and its continuity supported by saving the system without reparations.

For Salleh (2017, 61), ecofeminist material analysis traces the hegemony of masculinity across time in cultures, nature, bodies, work, logics, and technologies - returning to cultures, nature and so on. This analysis demonstrates how social movements from a variety of starting points seek to demonstrate culturally deeply rooted practices. Actors who do not fit into a hegemonic masculinity may become aware of their fragmented identities (ibid., 259-260). Moreover, in ecofeminist material analysis, this epistemology of the feminist standpoint, or way of knowing, is complemented by an understanding of the competent skills that actors master in their everyday lives, by which they live in the world as part of nature rather than apart from it (ibid., 262). A materially grounded epistemology is formed when women's suffering is linked to political understandings (ibid., 263).

Reproductive labour and the debt of capitalism

The title of Barca's work, *Forces of reproduction*, refers directly to reproductive labour that enables human communities and societies to function. Barca (2020) does not approach reproduction directly but draws out its multiple aspects by deconstructing the concept of the Anthropocene. She identifies colonialism, sexism, class-based discrimination, and speciesism based on previous literature. Barca's analysis makes visible the many ways in which the (slave) labour of ethnic groups, women, the lower classes, and other species has been incorporated into capitalistic

value creation through un(der)paid and subjugated labour.

Using the body as an example, Salleh (2017, 67) shows how the creation of life and the risking of life as part of operating in the world are set against each other in Western thinking. Women are demoted to a lower status by claiming that they do not participate in dangerous work in society because they give birth to life. Yet, pregnancy and childbirth can be very stressful, dangerous, and traumatising for women. Salleh's analysis of Marx's texts suggests a similar hierarchy, with human labour as a means of self-fulfilment that exploits the 'unproductive' reproductive labour of women and nature (ibid., 117). Therefore, Salleh (ibid., 113) questions the centrality of production in Marxist thought, as reproductive labour would have been a more natural starting point. She concludes that Western male thinkers have a special relationship with the concept of production (ibid., 127). Like Oksala's (2018) observations on biotechnology, Salleh (2017, 129) argues that men have made possible, through science-based reproductive technologies, the reproduction of humanity that can be harnessed to serve economic interests. The necessary question that follows from this, according to Salleh (ibid., 129), is how men and women reproducing masculinity can establish a material and discursive connection at a time of ecological crisis, during which the linear and exponential patterns of capitalism and socialism are challenged.

In relation to reproductive labour, it is appropriate to introduce Salleh's concept 'the debt of capitalism', including social, ecological and embodied debt (Salleh 2009, 4-5). A social debt is incurred by capitalist employers when working bodies and minds produce value in the industrial wage labour system or as unpaid slaves. An ecological debt is incurred between the Global North and the Global South when production exploits the South's natural resources or undermines the livelihoods of people in the Global South who live outside the industrial system. A embodied debt has been incurred in the global North and South to the reproductive labourers who generate use value and enable production by creating new workers for the

capitalist system. Therefore, movements against capitalism must consider workers, women, indigenous peoples, peasants, and environmentalists who have the potential to open the black box of the patriarchal system (Salleh 2009, 5).

Ecofeminist organising

Salleh (2017, 263) portrays four principles by which ecofeminists challenge the Western, Eurocentric worldview. First, nature and history form a material whole. Second, nature, women and men are simultaneously active subjects and passive objects. Third, "the woman-nature metabolism" is essential for analysing the historical enjoyment of rights, property, and sexuality. Fourth, reproductive labour is a model for sustainability.

In the conclusion of *Forces of reproduction*, Barca (2020, 60) refers to the meta-industrial workers of whom Salleh has written (Salleh 2009). The meta-industrial workers maintain a meta-industrial economy, the most visible elements of which are, for example, economic productivity discourse, wage labour and exchange value that benefits a small number of people (Salleh 2009, 24). This speech and action conceal the reproductive labour performed by women, peasants, indigenous peoples, among others, based on metabolic and utility value, which is sometimes compensated, albeit minimally. At the bottom, is the ecological discourse of nature and thermodynamics, where energy and material have agency, which is expressed in plants and animals. Their value is metabolic, and they are not compensated in any way.

Barca states that the common goal of the alliance of workers and meta-industrial workers is to keep the 'world alive' by exploiting the already existing counterbalancing forces of the Anthropocene and the Master's narrative. This requires the liberation of the forces of reproduction: the abandonment of plantations, indigenous autonomous conservation projects, the takeover of industrial means of production by workers, trade union environmental campaigning, community farming and reforestation, agroecology, permaculture, and land liberated from industrial use (Barca 2020, 61).

An ecofeminist mobilisation requires an understanding of how women's experiences are in fact shared (Salleh 2017, 250). What matters is not the emphasis on class, ethnicity, or age, but how we act together. However, Salleh argues that Northern hemisphere feminism needs to be more sensitive to class and ethnic differences (*ibid.*, 153). An influential social movement requires a sufficiently large number of participants and their understanding of why the problem exists, who wants to change it, what options are available, and how to implement them (*ibid.*, 269).

Directions for debating the political economy of ecofeminist degrowth

Next, I provide some guidelines for the political economy of degrowth and its ecofeminist analysis, as advocated by Mellor (2017). In Oksala's (2018) proposal, the feminist movement and the environmental movement should have a common goal: to challenge capitalism. Feminist economics and ecological economics have both shown that the work done by women, the oppressed or nature cannot be explicitly expressed in monetary terms or incorporated into a capitalist market economy. Therefore, according to Oksala, it is not enough to place care work or nature conservation 'outside' capitalism, but the goal must be more radical: to challenge capitalism.

Yet, there is a tension in ecofeminist thinking. Although ecofeminist philosophy is holistic, its action springs from local understandings. This tension underlies, among other things, the critique of ecofeminist initiatives and thinking. The question is therefore how to achieve an ecofeminist society when many local movements are forming their own visions of the good life. Warren (2000) estimates that an ecofeminist society will only be achieved in hundreds of years. However, according to Mies, grassroots subsistence does not automatically mean small and local, but can be

extended to a global economic system in which 'unproductive' work, such as domestic labour, is valued. Then the system would be based on the production of life rather than on overconsumption and the pursuit of profits (Gregoratti and Raphael 2018, 90).

FaDA plays its part in making space for ecofeminist degrowth. The network meets at international degrowth conferences and brings together feminist research and activism on degrowth, including between conferences (see e.g. FaDA 2020). Members of the network promote feminist degrowth thinking and highlight the importance of gender and care in understanding degrowth (Dengler and Lang 2021; Saave and Muraca 2021; Dengler and Strunk 2018; Paulsson et al. 2023).

When discussing the political economy of degrowth, it is important to highlight the work, thinking, and texts of ecofeminist thinkers so that the debate does not ignore the institutionalised exploitation of women, minorities, and other species as a resource to be freely subjugated in the economy. Ecofeminist degrowth thinking brings important perspectives to challenge capitalism. In addition to the political economy of care, the ecofeminist thinkers and actors presented in this text demonstrate that previous research has specified many other themes relevant to analysis, such as anthropocentrism, reproductive labour, and ecofeminist organising. The themes of the two books presented here alongside with other literature on ecofeminist political economy are only a glimpse into a field with rich ideas. For example, ecofeminists have extensively discussed food, veganism, and the politics of other species (see e.g. Gaard 2011). Moreover, gender diversity brings with it the need to queer ecofeminist thinking in the 2020s (Gaard 2015).

Ecofeminist literature, thinking and action are incredibly lush. Exploring this opens new ways of thinking and acting in times of ecological crisis and commenting on current policy proposals from an interdisciplinary ecofeminist perspective.

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