



Ecofeminism and the Responsible Production of Food

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Ecofeminism, a movement that connects ecological concerns with feminist perspectives, critiques how women and nature have historically been marginalized, exploited, and treated as resources to be dominated. At its core, ecofeminism challenges patriarchal structures that reinforce environmental degradation and social inequality. One key area where this intersection becomes especially relevant is responsible food production. In understanding how food systems are shaped by power, gender, and environmental values, ecofeminism offers a robust framework for transforming how food is produced, distributed, and consumed.

Understanding Ecofeminism

The term "ecofeminism" was first coined in 1974 by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. Smith (1997) has studied ecofeminism from an anticolonial perspective. Smith states that the domination of women and nature started with colonization. On the other hand, Warren (1997) suggested taking the empirical data seriously and looking for an ecofeminist approach towards environmental problems. Warren substantiates that the issues of cutting down trees, deforestation, availability of potable water supply, availability of food, issues related to farming, knowledge of technologies, exposure to toxins and health risks because of the presence of uranium, health risks in children, and languages being sexist are all feminist. She supported her facts with empirical evidence. Puleo (2017) supports the

notion of critical ecofeminism for “all ecofeminisms are critical insofar as they criticize the current system”. She defines ecofeminism as “an attempt to outline a new utopian horizon, addressing the environmental issue from the categories of patriarchy, androcentrism, care, sexism, and gender”.

Ecofeminism is not a singular theory but rather a broad umbrella encompassing various strands of thought - cultural, social, and political - linking the oppression of women with the **degradation of the environment**. Ecofeminist thinkers argue that the same patriarchal logic that justifies the exploitation of the Earth also legitimizes the control and **subjugation of women**.

This connection is particularly evident in agricultural and food production systems. Historically, industrialized agriculture has devalued traditional ecological knowledge - often held and passed down by women - while favoring mechanized, **extractive farming models**. The ecofeminist critique extends beyond simple observation, as d'Eaubonne argued that "the patriarchy is responsible for both environmental disasters (through overproduction and the capitalist logic)" and the **systematic oppression of women**. Ecofeminism calls for re-evaluating these models and urges societies to embrace sustainable practices rooted in respect, care, and **interdependence**.

Gendered Roles in Food Production

Globally, women play a significant role in food systems. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), women comprise approximately 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to almost 50 percent in **East and Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa**. Women produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the **world's food production**. They are often responsible for planting, harvesting, seed selection, and food preparation, which are critical for ensuring **food security and biodiversity**.

However, their contributions are frequently undervalued and lack access to land, credit, education, and **decision-making power**. The FAO reports that women farmers typically achieve lower yields than men, "**not because they are less skilled, but because they operate smaller farms and use fewer inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds and tools**". If women had the same access to

productive resources as men, they could boost their yields by 20 to 30 percent, raising total farm output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 percent and potentially reducing the number of hungry **people worldwide by 12 to 17 percent**.

Ecofeminism seeks to make these gendered dynamics visible and advocate for more equitable systems. It promotes women's empowerment as stewards of land and knowledge, recognizing that sustainable food production cannot be achieved without **addressing issues of gender justice**. Moreover, ecofeminist approaches value the emotional and labor-intensive work of caregiving and subsistence farming, challenging capitalist systems **prioritizing profit over people and ecosystems**.

Sustainable and Ethical Food Practices

A responsible food production approach aligned with ecofeminist principles would involve agroecology, permaculture, organic farming, and **other regenerative practices**. These methods prioritize biodiversity, soil health, and **closed-loop systems that minimize waste**. They also emphasize cooperation over competition, reflecting feminist values of care, reciprocity, and interdependence.

Agroecology, for example, is not just a set of farming techniques but a social movement that values food sovereignty and the rights of smallholder farmers. Many ecofeminist activists see agroecology as a pathway to **transform gender relations and environmental outcomes**. It provides an alternative to the dominant, extractive model of agriculture, fostering food systems that sustain both people and the planet.

The concept of "feminist agroecology" has emerged as a framework that "**places 'life', relationships, care and balance at the center of the food system**". This approach recognizes that "**women smallholders in many countries produce most of the world's food yet remain marginalized in decision-making processes**". Furthermore, responsible food production includes ethical considerations about animal welfare, fair labor practices, and access to **nutritious food**. An ecofeminist perspective urges consumers to consider the broader impacts of their dietary choices, including how they affect marginalized communities and ecosystems. This does not necessarily prescribe

a single diet (such as veganism) but calls for conscious consumption grounded in **compassion, justice, and sustainability**.

Community and Connection

Community-supported agriculture (CSA), which originated in Japan in the 1960s when "a group of women concerned with the use of pesticides, the increase in processed and imported food, and the loss of farmers and farmland" created direct relationships with farmers, exemplifies ecofeminist **principles in action**. CSA creates "a production and marketing model whereby consumers buy shares of a farm's harvest in advance," allowing farmers and consumers to "**share the risks and benefits of food production**".

Such practices also help rebuild the relationship between humans and the natural world. In many traditional cultures, women have acted as caretakers of seeds and **cultivators of biodiversity**. As Shiva notes in *Staying Alive*, women in subsistence economies who produce wealth in partnership with nature, have been experts in ecological knowledge of nature's processes. Revitalizing these roles can help restore environmental balance while fostering **cultural continuity and social empowerment**.

Conclusion

Ecofeminism offers a compelling critique of both environmental and social injustices embedded in the current food system. By highlighting the links between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, it pushes for systemic change rooted in **care, equity, and sustainability**. From this perspective, responsible food production is not only about reducing emissions or increasing yields - it is about transforming relationships between humans and the Earth, genders, and communities.

To create a just and sustainable food future, we must listen to and empower those who have long cared for the land - often women and marginalized communities, and work together to build systems **that nourish rather than exploit**. As contemporary ecofeminist movements demonstrate, from Brazilian women farmers fighting for "agroecology and feminism" to Indian women

leading biodiversity conservation efforts, the path forward requires recognizing that "the liberation of nature" and "the liberation of women" are **fundamentally interconnected struggles**. Ecofeminism shows us that the path to ecological and social healing begins not with domination but with solidarity, care, and the recognition that human and environmental well-being are inseparably linked.

Author Biography

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