

COOPERATION FOR WHAT DEVELOPMENT?

Proposals for an ecofeminist model of development

Dina Garzón



Il·lustració: [Hansel Obando](#)

Ecofeminism is a movement on the rise

Ecofeminism experienced a rebirth in 2019, just before the emergence of the current pandemic. Among other factors, this was due to the strength of the feminist movement and the youth climate movement, as thinker Alicia Puleo explained. She also correctly pointed out that another of the reasons behind this increased strength is ecofeminism's focus on indigenous women who defend the land against extractivism, which sometimes even costs them their lives. Many young women identify with this movement, which began in the early 1970s. But it is now, after 50 years of ecofeminist history, that it appears to be stronger and more widely supported. As the Mexican philosopher Aimé Tapia tells us, the women of the Abya Yala peoples who are currently involved in resistance movements are creating alternatives for a sustainable culture, and have undeniable links with the ecofeminist movement, as they both have a number of characteristics in common despite using different terminologies.

The global health crisis of the last two years has merely reinforced ecofeminism's position as an emerging movement, and given it increasing vitality and recognition. The lockdown has undoubtedly shown us as a society that some of the realities that we thought were

entrenched can totter and collapse in a single day. Many of us hope that the neoliberalism that has predominated in recent decades will decline, and give way to an era in which the conservation of our environment in just and egalitarian societies with broad social welfare coverage will become the common goal in the short term. In these societies, the concept of “degrowth” would undoubtedly not be considered a decline in the quality of life, but instead quite the opposite. Casting aside the bonds of excessive consumerism could become a catalyst for “living well”, and even make us happier.

This upsurge that ecofeminism is experiencing cannot be explained by any single cause. Society’s growing concern about the ecological crisis is undoubtedly one of the main reasons behind it. The feminist movement is not indifferent to this concern. A growing number of feminists are beginning to understand the terrible consequences of the environmental-social crisis, that its effects will not impact women and men in the same way, and that poor women, migrants and the most disadvantaged sectors of society will suffer to a greater extent. As a result, it is easy to understand why the feminist movement is currently increasingly influenced by the principles of ecofeminism, and that answers to both ecological and broad-based gender problems are being sought in this movement. It is also not surprising that its ideas are currently to some extent being echoed among public opinion, despite this public opinion previously failing to pay a great deal of attention for decades when ecofeminist theorists linked the subordination of women to the domination of Nature, and when they explained how this situation was also leading us to the ecological crisis that we are experiencing today.

The climate and ecological crisis

Countless books, reports, articles and documentaries have warned us about the current degradation of the planet. Among these is [the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Sixth Assessment Report](#), which was published in August 2021. The IPCC is a scientific and technical support body created by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1988, to provide comprehensive assessments of the state of scientific, technical and social-economic knowledge on climate change. Its sixth report was produced over three years by 234 renowned scientists from 66 different countries, and for the first time clearly attributes the progression of the climate crisis to human activity. The report reaches a number of conclusions, including that “it is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land,” and that “the scale of recent changes across the climate system as a whole and the present state of many aspects of the climate system are unprecedented over many centuries to many thousands of years”. It also says that human influence has increased the chance of extreme events since the 1950s, including an increase in the frequency and intensity of heatwaves and droughts on a global scale, an increase in the risk of fires in all inhabited continents, and the increase in rainfall and extreme flooding on the planet. It includes a categorical statement that should make us reflect on our extreme anthropocentrism: “Life on earth can recover from major climate change by evolving into new species and creating new ecosystems. Humanity cannot”. The report concludes by stating that action must be taken immediately, and that since human activity is responsible for this crisis, human action is

also the only thing that can mitigate its impact.

The thirteenth edition of [the Living Planet Report](#) published by the WWF in 2020 had a significant impact due to its conclusions regarding the loss of biodiversity. According to the organisation, the report provides scientific evidence that unsustainable human activity is pushing the planet's natural systems that support life on Earth to the limit, and like the IPCC's sixth assessment report, it urges world leaders to come together to build a more sustainable world in the wake of Covid-19. Meanwhile, [the joint IPBES \(Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services\) - IPCC report](#) concludes that it is necessary to protect nature to address the climate crisis, since neither of these two major challenges can be resolved if they are not addressed together.

A growing number of feminists are beginning to understand that the environmental-social crisis effects will not impact women and men in the same way, and that poor women, migrants and the most disadvantaged sectors of society will suffer to a greater extent

The list of scientific and political advocacy reports that come to similar conclusions is endless. A simple search with any internet browser using the keywords "report", "climate change", "biodiversity loss" or "science" shows the amount of information we already have for understanding the magnitude of the challenge that current generations must face. The days in which the real effects of the environmental crisis were called into question are behind us, and now the only issue open to debate is the magnitude of what is going to happen sooner or later. It is a curious fact that this abundance of evidence-based information has not led to the unanimity of opinion among many social groups regarding the actions required and their urgency that might have been anticipated.

Ecofeminism, thought and action in the face of the global crisis

As discussed above, an overwhelming majority of scientific reports highlight the urgent need to take action to address the global crisis. In other words, science is urging us to change the foundations on which our anthropocentric society is built, which is simply a society based on the idea that the human being is the only thing that matters. They provide an ever increasing quantity of data and growing certainty, and call on us to take urgent action to stop (if the current inertias persist) what would lead to the end of the hegemony of our species on planet Earth in a few decades, involving scenarios of extreme suffering just around the corner.

From the feminist perspective, as ecofeminism is feminism, we also want to head in this direction, and move away from the androcentric culture that has led to women being oppressed by those who should have been their equals for generations. We therefore call

for women to play a central role in this revolution, prioritising the new values that should be the cornerstone of this society of the future, such as replacing violence and oppression with empathy and solidarity. Of course, we have not forgotten that women also need to lead the design of the roadmap that prevents the catastrophic effects of inaction predicted by science. Although ecofeminist philosophy tells us how we got here and shows us the foundations we need in order to create that desired society, free of domination of people and other animals, it is also necessary to move beyond the realm of ideas. While ecofeminism is thought, it is also action - feminist, environmentalist and animalist action.

The IPCC report says that “we must redefine our way of life and consumption”. If we want this change to happen in a fair and equal way, we need ecofeminist action. As Alicia Puleo points out, “ecofeminism is a redefinition of reality, as are feminism, animalism and environmentalism, which are intertwined in their theory and practice”. Ecofeminism can and must act by providing the tools for all emancipatory movements to understand, complement and strengthen each other through this cooperation, reinforcing each other by focusing on what unites us and not on the minor points that separate us, and which in reality enrich us by giving us a broad-based approach and intersectionality that would otherwise be difficult to achieve. There is no doubt that the task is enormous, and we will require all our possible collective intelligence to carry out this revolution to preserve the planet. The mutual aid agreements between social movements advocated by ecofeminism could become the starting point for any future action plan.

Ecofeminist cooperation

In addition to being unpredictable, the effects of ecological deterioration and climate change do not influence the lives of everyone on Earth to the same extent. Large areas of the planet are already suffering from serious impacts that will in many cases be irreversible if we do not take action to regenerate environments and ecosystems, and adopt social measures to mitigate the avalanche of human suffering that this deterioration in living conditions brings with it. “Climate migration” is a new term that is unfortunately in increasingly common use. We ecofeminists understand that the suffering of other animals is also our responsibility, and that we cannot ignore their pain. The loss of biodiversity and the climate crisis directly affect people’s well-being. It is also evidence that there can be no justice, equality or progress for peoples without education for girls and without respect for women’s sexual and reproductive rights. We therefore must not address migration and international cooperation policies without feminism, without ecology or without animalism. The challenges in the coming years require the complexity of ecofeminist thought, with the various intersectional nuances that it adds to analyses, but they will also require the simplicity of its approaches, which have no hidden agendas and aim to work in partnership with the other social movements.

The challenges in the coming years require the complexity of ecofeminist thought, but they will also require the simplicity of its approaches, which have no hidden agendas and aim to work in

partnership with the other social movements

Critical ecofeminism does not believe in justifying customs that oppress women and non-human animals when engaging in a necessary criticism of ethnocentrism. Emancipatory thought cannot accept either its own oppressive mystifications or those of others, and reverence for practices that would be criticised by those who justify them in foreign cultures if they took place in our own culture cannot be justified. As Alicia Puleo reminds us, “suffering, confinement, discrimination, slavery, torture and exploitation are universal evils, and we cannot justify them with the argument that there are similar or comparable forms of abuse in our society”, and that “our objective must be to build an ecological culture of equality together, and not to venerate every custom simply because it is part of our cultural tradition or that of others”.

Ecofeminist Planning and Policies

Both feminism and the younger environmental movement have for decades been making cutting-edge proposals about human rights and the protection of our common home, which is our planet Earth. Great women including Petra Kelly, Wangari Maathai and Jane Goodall have revolutionised the world with their ecofeminist perspective on pacifism, ecology and our relationship with other animals and with nature. For example, Jane Goodall changed the way we understand the mutually beneficial relationship that can flourish between protected environments and local communities when the right steps are taken.

The constant debate that we ecofeminists engage in is concerned with moving in the right direction to reach that other possible world. Some necessary steps appear to have already been accepted by society in general, such as the need to decarbonise our energy system, although this progress needs to be addressed based on equity, justice and greater participation and democracy. The European Commission’s recent declaration that gas and nuclear energy are green energies is not exactly an example of a wise decision. Technologies based on the use of renewable energies are today a basic tool in the development of local energy communities, and the incorporation of women on an equal footing in the energy sector is an issue that has yet to be resolved. Appropriate planning of the development of renewable energies without their use involving serious impacts on the territory is perfectly possible and desirable. We will have to degrow and be more efficient, and the era of energy wastage will surely come to an end soon. As a result of the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to overcome the planet’s physical limits in future scenarios involving a scarcity of materials and resources, we will need an ecofeminist energy transition like the one developed by Cristina Saavedra, head of climate justice at Amigos de la Tierra in Spain. In the transport sector, the idea of giving up hypermobility in the countries of the Global North is being formulated by ecofeminism: returning to trains, bicycles, public transport and a leisurely pace of life is an attractive idea to many of us, and one that is totally consistent with the age in which we live.

The major commitment to the global south is based on agroecology and food sovereignty.

Ecofeminist voices from the global North and South including Emma Silipandri, Gloria Zuloaga and Itziar Aguirre remind us that another world without agrochemicals is possible, and that the traditional knowledge of peasant women is perfectly consistent with the latest breakthroughs in agroecology. An agriculture that sustains the diet of the future, based on vegetables in harmony with nature and the restoration of ecosystems damaged by improper use, massive logging and extractivism must be an absolute priority from North to South and from East to West. As we have repeated so often, women cannot be left out of this green revolution.

At the beginning of this article, I mentioned the profound connection between indigenous women in defence of the land and ecofeminism, and their shared struggle against extractivist practices in the North and South. This looting is not content with plundering natural resources, but also seeks to profit from the bodies of impoverished women in the global south by hiring surrogate mothers. Together with prostitution, feminism has exposed this trade in women, and it is to be hoped that it will soon be restricted by governments around the world. The philosopher Angélica Velasco has spent years researching prostitution and the pornification of society from an ecofeminist perspective. There is no room for slavery in our ideal world. Other invisible victims are non-human animals, which are pursued as a result of the illegal trafficking of species, hunting and the loss of their habitats. Although veganism is not an issue subject to consensus in all the currents of ecofeminism, a reduction in the consumption of meat and the ethical treatment of all species that live with us on our planet certainly is.

We could fill pages and pages with ecofeminist proposals for greening our cities, towns and our planet as a whole, living in harmony with other animals and replacing the values of the warrior with those of justice, equality and empathy. However, a good start would be for the countries of the North to begin the path of voluntary degrowth by reducing our ecological footprint, and for all social movements, pacifists, animalists, advocates for LGTBQ rights, anti-racists, feminists and environmentalists to support each other to achieve the broadest consensus as soon as possible to enable us to move forward in all the directions necessary to address the environmental-social crisis, and renew our hopes of reaching that other possible world as a result. We ecofeminists are of course more than willing to sit down and talk, bravely and honestly.

REFERENCES

- Garzón Pacheco, D. (2020) "No hay planeta B", en Alicia Puleo (ed.) *Ser Feministas. Pensamiento y Acción*. Madrid: Cátedra, Colección Feminismos.
- Tapia González, A. (2018) *Mujeres indígenas en defensa de la Tierra*. Madrid: Cátedra, Colección Feminismos.
- Puleo, A. (2019) *Claves Ecofeministas. Para rebeldes que aman a la Tierra y a los animales*. Madrid: Plaza y Valdés Editores.
- Puleo, A. (2015) "El Ecofeminismo y sus compañeros de ruta", en Puleo, A. (ed.) *Ecología*

y *Género en Diálogo Interdisciplinar*. Madrid: Plaza y Valdés Editores.

- Velasco Sesma, A. (2017) *La Ética Animal. ¿Una cuestión feminista?* Madrid: Cátedra, Colección Feminismos.



Dina Garzón

Dina Garzón is the co-founder and coordinator of *Red Ecofeminista* (Ecofeminist Network), an international association established in Madrid in 2012. She studied Industrial Engineering, and has completed a Master's Degree in Environmental Management and Renewable Energies. She has worked in the European Projects department of the Andalusian Energy Agency, and with the Greens in the European Parliament. She is co-founder of the Lasgaya ecofeminist cooperative, and currently works in the energy sector. She is the coordinator of the University of Valladolid's online course entitled "Ecofeminism. Thought, Culture and Praxis".