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Radical Ecological Economics and Community Ecofeminism.
Two Proposals for Understanding Alternative Socio-Metabolic Processes

Erika Carcaño Valencia

Professor University of Guanajuato

Department of Public Management and Development

Blvd. Milenio 1001, Predio San Carlos, 37670 León de los Aldama, Gto. México

E-mail: erikacarcano@gmail.com

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Abstract

The epistemological challenge of radical ecological economics is to understand sustainability with environmental justice and to account for community subjects (men and women) and the potential they have to confront actions that modify their socio-metabolic configurations imposed by depredatory and extractivist development logics.

For its part, community ecofeminism takes into account in its analysis the link between women and nature, criticises the development model and its extractivist practices, and suggests that women's perspectives and experiences differ according to their rural and/or peripheral situation, proposing as an alternative new social pacts and new forms of community strategies, which are incorporated into new feminine and masculine identities, underpinning processes of community agency that appeal to the sustainability/reproduction of life.

This chapter will analyse how these two theoretical proposals thus open up the possibility of identifying analytical categories with which to dialogue and explain in a more holistic way the emancipatory processes of indigenous-peasant communities, thus raising an interdisciplinary debate that contributes to the analysis of the sustainability of human and planetary life.

Keywords: radical ecological economics, ecofeminism

1. Introduction

Radical Ecological Economics (REE) has insisted on the need to make explicit the role of the actors or subjects that participate or form part of community life projects and their potential to construct alternatives to the violent and extractive logics of the dynamics of capital accumulation. The EER has referred to these actors as “the community subject” that assumes a collective consciousness, which also acquires a political stance against those elements that dislocate the socio-metabolic configurations and life projects of the communities.

Understanding the role of community subjects implies for Radical Ecological Economics to build a bridge of dialogue with other currents of critical thought that allow us to explain these dynamics in a context where these development strategies put at risk the permanence of mainly indigenous peasant peoples, but which also takes into account the protagonism of indigenous peasant women in these processes.

One of the currents that we propose to generate this dialogue with Radical Ecological Economics is what we have called: Community Ecofeminism. This epistemic articulation allows us to make up for the debt that Ecological Economics has had for a long time by not incorporating the category of gender in its analysis.

While it is true that Ecological Economics was born as a response to the dominant economic paradigm, incorporating in its analysis other ways of valuing nature and introducing principles such as the second law of thermodynamics, which evidently positioned it in an advanced place, paradoxically it remained conservative in that it did not enunciate and describe the roles, impacts and contributions of the various actors involved in the

socio-metabolic process, i.e. it did not differ much in this area. Paradoxically, it remained conservative in the sense that it did not enunciate and describe the roles, impacts and contributions of the various actors involved in the socio-metabolic process, i.e. it did not differ much in this area from conventional economic theory, as it still resorted to the androcentric abstraction of the rational maximising agent.

Likewise, for Radical Ecological Economics it has been important to situate socio-environmental problems and alternative proposals, understanding that the roots of socio-environmental problems are rooted in the logic of capitalist accumulation and that the impacts have been differentiated in different geographical latitudes, where indigenous peasant peoples are those who have directly received these "onslaughts" of capital.

In Latin America, these socio-environmental problems have worsened in recent decades due to the dominant development model through the commodification of nature, which has condemned peripheral countries rich in biodiversity to become sacrifice zones (Svampa, 2013), plundering natural resources and affecting the communities living in these territories.

It is worth noting that the high concentration of natural resources in these territories has led to the promotion of extractivist megaprojects. One of their characteristics is that they are enclave economies, i.e. with productive activities oriented towards exports and lacking integration into the local market. Governments have opted for this neo-extractivist model because they believe that by attracting foreign direct investment, increasing exports and effectively exploiting natural resources, economic growth can be achieved (Gudynas, 2000). However, these projects have serious socio-environmental repercussions.

Some of these impacts are manifested in the concession of territories for exploitation without considering the indigenous-peasant communities that inhabit them, in violation of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation, which mentions that it is important to recognise the culture and values of indigenous peoples. On the other hand, it is necessary to consider that it is the community actors who should decide about their lands and their own development (Azamar & Carcaño, 2017).

In this way, these territories inhabited mainly by indigenous peoples, who for centuries have cared for and preserved their ecosystems, see their community life projects at risk due to the implementation of the so-called "death projects".

Among the community subjects facing these attacks, the role of women stands out in diverse praxis that contribute to the defence of the territory, in their claims as women leaders of their communities, as well as in community well-being as a whole.

From the dialogue between Radical Ecological Economics and community Ecofeminism, we believe that a more holistic explanation of this phenomenon may be possible, as well as providing epistemic keys based on community praxis for a better understanding of the processes that these peoples are developing to sustain life.

This chapter is structured as follows: in the first section we give a brief historical overview of Ecological Economics up to Radical Ecological Economics, passing through Ecofeminism.

We then explain what community Ecofeminism is and how it is nourished by community feminism and how it articulates with Radical Ecological Economics. The last section is dedicated to understanding how these perspectives address the sustainability/reproduction of life. Finally, we present the conclusions.

2. A Brief Historical Overview

Ecological Economics (EE) and Ecofeminism were born in a scenario where the civilisational crisis and the impacts derived from the capitalist economic system were making their effects evident, especially in the so-called third world countries: high levels of pollution, deepening social and economic asymmetries, as well as various conflicts over the use of and access to natural resources.

One of the first voices to denounce these effects was Rachel Carson, who in 1962 published "Silent Spring", in which she warned about the abuse of pesticides and chemical products. A decade later, the report "The Limits to Growth" by D.H. Meadow and his collaborators at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) showed that the drive for industrialisation and the progressive accumulation of capital were generating environmental and social impacts, and that if this trend continued, the result would be social and ecosystemic collapse (Gudynas, 2004). These works contributed to placing the connection between economic processes and environmental problems at the centre of the debate.

Theoretical proposals from economics were not long in coming. Environmental Economics (EE), which is a branch of conventional economics, offered an explanation and possible solutions to this phenomenon, criticising that environmental problems are merely problems related to market failures (Naredo, 2015) and that these can be solved by internalising externalities. This position is based on the assumption that any externality, any contribution of an environmental resource or service not included in the market, can receive a monetary valuation. However, as Martínez (1998, p. 45) mentions, "Once the externalities have been internalised, that is, once these hidden costs (or benefits) have been computed and imputed to those economically responsible for them, the logic of the market triumphs once again".

In response to Environmental Economics, Ecological Economics (EE) emerged in the 1980s. The contributions of Georgescou Roegen, considered the father of Ecological Economics, in his work published in 1971: "The law of entropy and the economic process", in which he addresses the relationship between economics and thermodynamics, as well as the construction of the bioeconomy, marked a before and after in the questioning of the axiomatic and mechanistic structure of conventional economics to address environmental issues within economics (Georgescu-Roegen, 1996; Naredo, 2015).

Thus, EE discussed the entropic limit of the economic process and the incommensurability between ecological processes and market valuation mechanisms. For ecological economics, assigning an economic valuation to nature is a reductionism of conventional economic rationality. An example of this is the memorandum signed by Lawrence H. Summers in 1991, suggesting that, in order to increase the welfare of the world economy, polluting industries should be relocated to Third World countries (!). On 12 December 1991, Summers signed a

memorandum written by Lant Pritchett, one of his economists at the World Bank, in which he argued, among other things, that developed countries should move their polluting industries to developing countries, because pollution affects developing countries less, as the existing wage scale makes people sicker or die on a smaller scale due to pollution. Thus, it seems to be argued, in terms of welfare losses, that pollution affects rich countries much more than poor countries.

To explain the relationships between economic processes and their implications for ecosystems, SE has made use of different versions: i) Conservative version, which recognises the economy as an open system but does not incorporate social conflict; ii) Critical version, which bases its analysis on distributive ecological conflicts, questions economic rationality and the centrality of the market, but does not delve into the problem of class struggle (Barkin, et al., 2011); iii) Radical version, which assumes that unsustainable sociometabolic configurations have structural roots in capitalism with deeper implications in its neoliberal phas; iii) Radical version, which assumes that unsustainable sociometabolic configurations have a structural root in capitalism with deeper implications in its neoliberal phase; iii) Radical version, which assumes that unsustainable sociometabolic configurations have a structural root in capitalism with deeper implications in its neoliberal phase.

Thus, it can be argued that in addressing these challenges, RE emphasises the role of the community subject as one who becomes collectively aware and takes a political stance to confront the factors that are disrupting their community life projects (Barkin, 2022).

3. Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism emerged in the 1970s as part of the second wave of feminism and the green movement (Mellor, 2000). Ecofeminism shows the convergence between feminism and ecology, coinciding in affirming that the subordination of women and ecological deterioration are linked, which is why this current proposes a change in the social model that respects the material bases that sustain life (Herrero, 2013). There are various ecofeminist currents, but it has mainly been identified with the radical/cultural/spiritual current and with the current that proposes more social political perspectives derived from Marxism (Carcaño, 2008).

One of the main exponents of Ecofeminism is Vandana Shiva, who criticises the dominant economic model and agribusiness with its monoculture techniques, use of agrochemicals and large quantities of water. She emphasises the defence of traditional agricultural practices through polycultures, the care and preservation of indigenous seeds, with the aim of local subsistence production with local inputs.

Ecofeminist proposals continued to develop during the 1970s and 1980s, as the impact of the development process on both women and the environment began to be discussed more forcefully. Ecofeminist literature has continued to grow, adding diverse voices from the global south, primarily indigenous and peasant women, who speak out for socio-environmental justice in the face of the dispossession and violence to which communities have been subjected by the accumulation of capital.

4. What is Community Ecofeminism?

We have called community ecofeminism the perspective that takes into account for its analysis the link between women and nature/territory, that criticises the development model and its extractive practices, and that proposes that women's perspectives and experiences are different to the extent that their situation is rural and/or peripheral, proposing as an alternative the defence of territory, new social pacts and new forms of community strategies, which are incorporated into new feminine and masculine identities to generate processes of community agency and sustainability/reproduction of life.

This approach takes into account what Radical Ecological Economics has called the community subject. In this case, community women are those who have the collective consciousness and political stance to confront the socio-metabolic fractures that put the community's life projects at risk. It is also necessary to highlight another aspect that is rarely, if ever, taken into account: these women are also decisive guardians of the millenary and sacred traditions of their communities. There is, therefore, a cultural and mythical perspective that is inseparable from the political aspects outlined above (Carcaño et al., 2022).

The importance of community ecofeminism as an analytical category lies in not losing sight of the fact that talking about community women breaks with the idea of "women" as a unitary category by taking into account class, race, ethnicity, among other factors. It also highlights the social, economic and political structures within which emancipatory processes in which women are a central part are constructed (Agarwal, 1998).

Community ecofeminism in turn draws on territorial community feminism which proposes that community is a social relationship in which women play an essential role because through their collective organisation they confront territorial dispossession, positioning a body-in-resistance as a construction inseparable from territory (Cruz, 2020, p. 16). In this perspective, the body-in-resistance represents the first territory that has to recover and defend itself from historical violence and the violence implicit in the processes of accumulation by dispossession of the territory-land (Cabnal, 2019; Harvey, 2007).

Likewise, the body-in-resistance-territory-recovered (Carcaño, 2024), can be related to collective constructions associated with mobilisation referring to sacred places or places of symbolic, political and cultural relevance (Cabnal, 2010 [cited by Ulloa, 2021, p. 40]). According to Cabnal: "Defending the body of the territory leads to assuming the body as a historical territory in dispute with ancestral and colonial patriarchal power, but we also conceive it as a vital space for the recovery of life" (Cabnal, 2018, p.102)

Furthermore, for territorial community feminism, the reproduction of life and the activities that surround it are fundamental to guarantee the permanence and continuity of communities (García & Cruz, 2020).

5. Community Ecofeminism and the Sustenance/Reproduction of Life

The dominant economic system and the idea of progress based on economic growth are therefore in deep crisis. Added to this are the adverse effects of the so-called "reproduction

crisis", which refers to the systematic exclusion of the population from access to the resources indispensable to meet their biological and social needs for reproduction. This has become a stereotypical feature of the supposed society-economy relationship (Quiroga, 2009).

For mainstream economics there is a traditional dualism between the sphere of production and the sphere of reproduction, in such a way that it hides the relationship and implications of the dynamics of production on society (considering differentiated impacts between men and women), as well as on nature. In this dualism, the market is the guiding axis. The supposed centrality of the market leads to nature being commodified, leaving aside the reproduction of life.

Polanyi (2004) sharply criticises the centrality of the market and argues that the creation of a self-regulating market economy requires that human beings and the natural environment become mere commodities, which guarantees the destruction of both society and the environment. The crisis of reproduction has opened up the possibility of thinking about alternative proposals for an economy for life, which would be one which:

"deals with the conditions that make life possible starting from the fact that the human being is a natural, bodily, needy being (subject of needs). It is therefore especially concerned with the material conditions (biophysical and socio-institutional conditions of life) that make life possible and sustainable, based on the satisfaction of needs and the enjoyment of all. This vision highlights the need to remove the foundations of the hegemonic economy in order to build an economy that responds to the subject in need" (Quiroga, 2009, p. 8).

So, we can identify the meeting points between Community Ecofeminism and Ecological Economics to give preponderance to the sustainability and reproduction of life.

From the realm of reproduction, Community Ecofeminism and Radical Ecological Economics share the fact that human life is eco-dependent, that is, it depends on nature and what nature provides (Herrero; 2013): "It recognises life as an inherent value of the biosphere and the need to articulate our eco-dependence within the laws of the biosphere and the sustainability of the web of life" (Gutiérrez, 2019, p. 8). Expansive economic growth according to the logic of capital puts human and non-human life at risk by not considering planetary biophysical limits. Likewise, as human beings in need we are interdependent, so we need the care of others and a community to survive. Thus: "Human life is bounded within narrow frameworks or conditions that must be respected, such that if they are not met death is the inevitable outcome" (Dussel, 2014, p. 19).

This position breaks with the idea of the independent and asocial homo economicus, who only seeks personal satisfaction from making decisions based on economic rationality. But as Naredo (2015) argues, the existence of the instrumental relationship of homo economicus with his environment is based on a subject-object relationship between human beings and nature, which leads him to justify material prosperity insofar as he exercises his individual freedom through the production and appropriation of wealth.

In this respect, Polanyi (2004) points out that this presupposes a society in which man's goal

is the production of commodities. However, this process cannot be conceived if it is not a necessary correlate of a process of human individualisation, which makes it possible, in a market society, for men to bind themselves as autonomous and independent individuals.

Hinkelammert (2010) calls this process the calculating individual. He refers to the way in which the individual calculates his material interests in terms of maximising his consumption and income. In this sense, an individual's capabilities can be employed in the pursuit of his or her particular material interests, so that efficiency and competitiveness are two pillars that serve the pursuit of such goals.

From the sphere of production, Radical Ecological Economics and Community Ecofeminism share the idea that production must be a category linked to the maintenance of the life and well-being of people and their community. In other words, what is produced must be something that allows human needs to be satisfied with criteria of equity, reciprocity and redistribution (Polanyi, 2004). In this sense, it is worth asking: What to produce? How to produce? For whom to produce? This implies addressing a process of reorganisation of the production model with criteria of social and environmental justice. In this regard, Burkett points out:

“Ecological Economics seeks the construction of alternative systems of reproduction for the consolidation of a radical model of sustainable development, which has as its principles the co-evolution of people with society and nature, culturally integrated productive practices; the growth of human capacities through sustainable exchanges with nature; grassroots communal systems for governance, creation and reinforcement of new collective relations of production and exchange; vernacular combinations of traditional knowledge rooted in and integrated with modern science and technology, fostering multiple pathways for human fulfilment within and through communities; ethical community solidarity in the management of common property natural resources; leisure time for the development and application of community workers' self-management skills; and, in general, the development of new forms of production, exchange and distribution guided by the values of life” (Burkett, 2008, p.75).

It is therefore important to assume that, in societies, economic functions are intertwined with social and symbolic activities and thus contribute to securing their conditions of reproduction. This leads us to understand that the economy is embedded in social and cultural relations and is not simply guided by market interests.

For Community Ecofeminism and Radical Ecological Economics, the sustaining and reproduction of life occupies a central place, where the sphere of production is not separated from the sphere of reproduction. Both form a community network that is anchored in the territory. Territory is not only a biophysical space but also a social, cultural, economic and political space (Villoro, 1999; Lefebvre, 1969; Barkin, et al, 2013). Control of territory for communities is fundamental, as their permanence and the implementation of community welfare projects depend on it (Armenta & Carcaño, 2021).

The community networks that enable the reproduction of life are “woven” from community care work (Carcaño et al., 2022), which consists of a social and symbolic organisation of

work based on cooperative relationships that enable the material and symbolic reproduction of the communities. In the division of labour by gender, the role of women stands out, as they carry out diverse tasks such as: care of the cornfield; care of backyard animals; care of children; management of ecosystems; management of cultural heritage, among others.

Ecosystem management is a task in which women are in direct contact, since the gender division of labour within the communities assigns to these women the responsibility of guaranteeing the well-being of the household, which has resulted in a vast knowledge of ecosystems that goes hand in hand with the cosmovision of their own culture, in which the relationship between human beings and nature is present.

Women actively participate in rural communities in actions for the conservation, care and defence of the territory. Likewise, women in the communities join productive projects through cooperatives and form alliances and networks with other collectives that advocate for women's rights, territorial defence, water care, etc. (Carcaño et al., 2022; Armenta & Carcaño; 2021).

At this point, we must not lose sight of the fact that gender relations in the communities have been changing decisively due to various factors. One of these is the growing process of mainly male migration that has taken place in recent decades. This has led to a productive feminisation in addition to their reproductive activities.

At the same time, there has been a strong tendency towards the formation of collective organisations of indigenous-peasant women who implement productive projects that generate surpluses and contribute to the strengthening and well-being of the community. In many cases, these women's organisations have been formed through a process of cultural and gender resistance that has led to collective decision-making and the struggle for new social pacts and new community strategies. These are new community strategies in which new femininities and masculinities are incorporated, giving way to a reality in which women are an essential part of the community.

6. Conclusions

The above shows, without a doubt, the extreme complexity of moving from economic paradigms based on the centrality of the market and profit, towards logics that take into account the dignity of life and the value of nature, as well as processes of empowerment in which historically neglected peoples are claiming a leading role that is undeniably one of social justice.

Within this panorama, the leading role of women belonging to indigenous peoples has been pointed out, who have been acquiring significant leadership, which implies, on the one hand, the capacity to make political decisions on the management and administration of territorial resources and, on the other, their projection on issues of care for their community, which is further enhanced if these women are older adults, in accordance with the new models of roles and functions of old age.

Finally, it should be noted that ecofeminism must also consider the important role of these

women in the maintenance, reception and transmission of an ancestral historical and mythical memory, which gives continuity and stability to the economic, affective and symbolic exchanges of these peoples.

In this way, we maintain as a working hypothesis that these women fulfil a triple role: they are *bearers*, i.e. they are a subject who feels that they can contribute something to society; they are *sustainers*, i.e. they are a subject who feels represented in the social contexts in which they live, and they are, finally, guardians, i.e. they are a subject willing or able to care for or preserve the social, just as the social cares for and preserves the subject (Klein, 2022).

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