



Feminist ecologies as an antidote to socioecological inequalities

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the analysis of the logic of extractive exploitation exercised by human beings on nature and the capitalist mode of production, we analyze the impacts caused by this exploitation on the environment and its consequences for the lives of women, especially those in the countries of the global South. Given this, we seek to understand how environmental justice can, and should, go hand in hand with reproductive justice to favor sustainable development as stipulated in the 2030 Agenda, highlighting the need for an intersectional understanding of the inequalities that women are exposed to. We also seek to understand how the logic of patriarchal and extractive power subjugates women and nature to economic interests, starting to systematize Marxist feminist ecologies by asking whether this current allows the necessary connection between environmental justice and reproductive justice. In this way, we understand that patriarchy and capitalism are inseparable phenomena that need to be analyzed together with the environmental panorama because they support the oppressive view that places women as subordinate to men and the Global south subordinate to the North, in the same way that it authorizes and encourages the exploitation of nature by those who hold power.

KEY-WORDS: Reproductive justice. Intersectionality. Climate change. Feminist ecologies.

1 INTRODUCTION

The understanding in which culture and nature appear on opposite sides speaks to the logic of domination, combined with modern science, which replaced an organic and holistic view of nature with a mechanistic perspective of production, and how relations between human beings and nature are established. According to Acosta (2016), in his work on “Good living”, this perspective authorized individuals, especially the dominant class, that is, the white man from the global North, to carry out actions that allow them to expand their dominion over nature and appropriate it.

Nature and women come closer in this sense: with the “feminization” of nature along with an idea of naturalization of women, the absence of rationality and the presence of sensitivity and weaknesses typical of the female gender (MERCHANT, 1998). Nature, in this context, is perceived as an external resource, capable of reach and domination by men, the same parallel can be drawn with what is done with women, racial and ethnic minorities (ACOSTA, 2016).

Although women played an important role in movements for the environment, participating significantly in protests related to the cause, especially in the 1960s, they did not have a position of leadership or influence within the group. It was in this context that currents of feminist ecologies emerged, such as ecofeminism, in which demands related to gender, many of which have already been discussed within the feminist movement, such as the issue of reproductive autonomy, intersect with issues related to the environment, such as exploitation soil and greenhouse gas emissions.

The idea that the development of rich countries would serve as a model of progress, encouraged the promotion of reproductive control in peripheral countries by central countries, with the promotion of policies aimed at demographic control with the reduction of birth rates in peripheral countries, known as the Global South. This pursuit was supported by the justification that the reduction of environmental impacts would go hand in hand with

demographic reduction, which proved not to be true, significantly affecting the sexual and reproductive rights of women, especially the poorest and most racialized women in the Global South. (UNFPA, 2009).

With this approach, as the general objective of this study, we seek to understand how environmental justice can, and should, go hand in hand with reproductive justice in favoring sustainable development, with attention to current human needs without compromising future generations, as stipulated by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda promoted by the United Nations (UN).

Given this, in the first chapter, we seek to understand how the impacts caused by environmental destruction significantly affect women and their children, especially in the event of environmental disasters caused by the extractive production method, which affects so-called underdeveloped countries even more severely. Thus, we observe how the destruction of the environment affects the exercise of women's sexual and reproductive rights, especially those in vulnerable situations in the Global South, highlighting how Reproductive Justice and intersectionality can contribute to reducing socio-environmental inequalities.

In the second chapter, we seek to analyze the connections between women and the environment, demonstrating that the same logic of patriarchal and extractive power that subjugates women also exercises human domination over nature. In this way, we move on to an elaboration of what feminist ecologies would be, including ecofeminism, asking ourselves whether this current allows for the necessary connection between environmental justice and reproductive justice. We highlight that the work is analyzed through bibliographic and documentary research, through the descriptive approach of materials collected from national and international portals, libraries and periodicals, and analyzed through the qualitative method of the investigated content.

2 CLIMATE CHANGE: THE NEED FOR A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 250,000 annual deaths could occur due to climate change between 2030 and 2050 (TREVIZO, 2020). These climate changes, accelerated by human behaviour, affect populations in different ways.

The United Nations (UN) indicates that 80% of people left homeless by climate change are women and that the social roles occupied by them, as primary caregivers, make them more vulnerable when an environmental disaster, such as floods or droughts, occurs (INSITUTO DE LA MUJER, 2020). It is noteworthy that social markers such as race, geographic location, age and economic status affect the way climate change is faced. Intersectional inequalities affect women in different ways, which affects the way they suffer the consequences of the climate crisis (TREVIZO, 2020).

The situation that African-American women went through in the city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina is an example of this. More than half of the city's poor families were headed by single mothers before the tragedy, these women were dependent on their communities and their support networks for subsistence. After the hurricane, these networks

were destroyed, and communities were divided, putting women and children at even greater risk (HALTON, 2018).

Furthermore, due to the sexual division of labour, the burden of water and food shortages generally falls on women, who are obligated to walk even further in search of these supplies. When this scarcity leads people to migrate to other regions, it is usually men who leave home in search of better economic conditions while women have no choice but to stay and take care of the family (BOWEN, 2016).

As the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) explains, with the increase in periods of drought, women and girls need to travel greater distances to collect materials such as firewood, for example, being even more exposed to sexual and gender-based violence. Furthermore, health services, especially sexual and reproductive health services, are often limited or cut off when an environmental catastrophe occurs, which further exposes women to the risk of unwanted pregnancies, spontaneous abortions, maternal deaths and unintended births, without medical monitoring and assistance. Furthermore, the risk of gender-based violence, early marriage, and menstrual poverty increases:

[...] A capacidade das mulheres e meninas de administrar sua menstruação com dignidade é prejudicada quando há falta de água potável e produtos menstruais. Quando ocorre um desastre relacionado ao clima, mulheres e meninas correm maior risco de violência de gênero. As meninas que não podem frequentar a escola se forem deslocadas, por exemplo, correm o risco de serem casadas precocemente por pais que não podem mais cuidar delas se perderam seus meios de subsistência. Uma menina casada com um homem muito mais velho corre maior risco de violência por parceiro íntimo devido ao desequilíbrio de poder no relacionamento (UNFPA, 2021, s.p.)

In the socio-environmental context, even if a natural disaster does not occur that directly affects the region's residents, food is distributed unequally among the populations, with women and children being the first to suffer in its absence (BOWEN, 2016). When these catastrophes happen, such inequalities are exacerbated: increased tension and stress in the domestic environment, alcohol consumption and domestic violence (NEUMAYER; PLUMPER, 2007) linked to previously existing difficulties.

The treatment given by States to women is worrying not only in situations of environmental disasters, as already reported, but in times of public calamity in general, when sexual and reproductive health services suffer a strong impact, as was the case with the viral pandemic by Covid-19 in Brazil. During the years 2020 to 2022, these services were greatly affected with the suppression of several public policies, such as the dismantling of the “Rede Cegonha” (JUNIOR; BEZERRA, 2022), the lack of investment in women's health, reduction of beds for pregnant women and a drop in prenatal and postpartum exams.

According to research led by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), the lack of effective public policies resulted in an excess of 70% in maternal mortality rates from March 2020 to May 2021, and whose women in the North and Northeast regions of the country were the most affected (ORELLANAL; et. al., 2022). As mudanças climáticas ocasionam sérios impactos na vida das mulheres, e ocasionarão impactos ainda maiores. A subida da temperatura piora a saúde materna e do recém-nascido, segundo pesquisa publicada no “International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health” por Kuehn e McCormick (2017), o aumento de um

grau celsius na temperatura da semana antes do parto, corresponde uma probabilidade 6% maior da criança nascer natimorta.

As if this were not enough, since women have less political and socioeconomic power, they are given less bargaining power and participation in decision-making processes. In a report released by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2009), it is clear that poor women in less developed countries are the most affected by the climate, while at the same time they are those who least contribute to global warming and the destruction of ecosystems. .

This occurs precisely because of gender inequalities that lead women to earn lower wages than men in the world of formal work and outside it, since unpaid domestic work is still carried out disproportionately by women. Therefore, they are the ones that contribute the least to environmental pollution, playing a smaller role in the destruction and contamination of ecosystems, but they are the ones that suffer the worst consequences (FOLTER, 2020).

Thus, for many marginalized and racialized girls and women, climate change tends to affect them even more profoundly, worsening existing difficulties and challenges. To date, efforts to stop global warming and its impacts have not been sufficient, especially for these groups. Countries with the highest fertility rates tend to be the poorest, with less technology, little investment in reproductive health and sexual education, and with the lowest pollutant emission rates.

Approximately 80% of the world's population, that is, the global South, generates on average 20% of greenhouse gas emissions, while the other 20% of the population, the global North, is responsible for 80% of these toxic emissions. Despite this, the argument of global overpopulation as a justification for the increase in global warming reappeared at the 2009 United Nations Conference on Climate Change, with suggestions for family planning in poor communities to reduce carbon gas emissions (TREVIZO, 2020).

Women in the global South have fewer resources to adapt to climate change than those in rich countries, and despite receiving little or no support in terms of the survival of their families, the global spotlight is focused on their fertility. As already demonstrated, it is a fact that countries with the highest birth rates are those that contribute the least to the emission of greenhouse gases, but this does not prevent campaigns from being carried out to remove the autonomy of these women's bodies.

With the end of the Second World War and the beginning of the Cold War, with the expansion of North American dominance over the world, a discourse of a highly eugenic nature emerged camouflaged as the “search for development”. For Acosta (2019), the global imperative of development was institutionalized on January 20, 1949, in that year the then-President of the United States, Harry Truman, when inaugurating his second term with a speech in Congress, defined most of the world as “underdeveloped areas”.

During this period, with the consolidation of a dichotomous structure between developed/underdeveloped, poor/rich, and advanced/backward, several projects “specialized” in financing development emerged, so that several countries in the global North began to interfere in the internal politics of the South, such as through the International Monetary Fund (ACOSTA, 2019). This interference occurred in several ways, one of them being the sponsorship of several dictatorships in Latin America, as was the case in Brazil.

It was in this “developmental” context that demographic control in so-called underdeveloped countries began to be defended as a strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, a significant interference with women's sexual and reproductive rights. This becomes evident with the publication of “Security Study Memorandum 200: Implications of World Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests” written in 1974, also known simply as the “Kissinger Report”, since It was organized by then-US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger.

This document made it clear that the growth of the world population would be a threat to developed countries and the environment, running the risk of a lack of food, water, and fuel. The way to avoid this risk would be birth control through contraceptives and forced mass sterilization procedures, which is observed in several sections of the report, as follows:

Além disso, em algumas regiões superpovoadas, o rápido crescimento populacional pressiona um ambiente frágil, de maneiras que ameaçam a produção de alimentos a longo prazo: através do cultivo de terras marginais, sobrepastoreio, desertificação, desmatamento e erosão do solo, com consequente destruição da terra e poluição da água, rápido assoreamento de reservatórios e deterioração do interior e pesca costeira (KISSINGER, 1974, p. 05)

Thus, the rules of “anything goes” are accepted in a world where everything is tolerated in the fight for “progress”, a concept that is also questioned by Acosta (2019). In exchange for this, the environmental and social annihilation of everything that does not dialogue with the developmental ideal is accepted: [...] “In order for the poor to escape their poverty, the rich established that, to be like him, the poor must now pay to imitate him: even buy his knowledge, marginalizing his own ancestral wisdom and practices (ACOSTA, 2019, p. 51). Continuing with the perception that birth control is an effective way to address the problem of global overpopulation is dangerous for the lives of women in the South, especially for those who are black and poor.

Political scientist Flávia Biroli explains that in 1992 a Mixed Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry was established in the National Congress with the aim of investigating allegations of mass sterilization of women during the period of the military dictatorship in the country, when the “International Planned Parenthood Federation” acted in Brazil, aligned with United States policies to reduce birth rates in the Global South (FARIAS, 2018). It is noteworthy that the Brazilian Family Planning Law dates to 1996, a period close to the reported facts, making it possible to draw a parallel between the previous events that influenced the creation of this law.

In this context, it is important to address women's sexual rights, reproductive rights and reproductive health from the intersectional perspective of reproductive justice. This conception of justice covers topics related to food security, environmental pollution, access to drinking water, safe housing, reduction of institutional violence, among others, which link government obligation to the search for guaranteeing and realizing these rights (COLLINS; BILGE, 2021) . Loretta Ross (n.d., p.14), one of the main exponents in the fight for reproductive justice, states that it means: “the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, social and economic well-being of women and girls, as a basis in the full achievement and protection of women’s human rights”.

According to Trevizo (2020), the use of the reproductive justice framework encompasses a range of social, economic and environmental issues that must also be seen as reproductive issues, and from this, there may be the inclusion of measures in state programs in these fields with transversality of gender against domestic violence, forced sterilization, accessible medical care and the opportunity to access health and education for all.

The idea of justice, from this perspective, is broader than that of law, with the inclusion of social intersections that encompass girls and women in their multiple diversities, referring to economic, social, and political resources so that they can make safe and secure decisions. healthy people on their bodies in a way that is not just individual, but also considers the social perspective, their families, communities and social structure (OLIVEIRA, 2022).

Given this, there is a need for environmental issues to be addressed from the perspective of reproductive justice, with women's active voice in these processes. One of the alternatives to this issue, proposed by women, is feminist ecologies, among which is the theoretical-methodological current known as ecofeminism, as will be studied below.

3 FEMINIST ECOLOGIES: A POSSIBLE WAY

The search for an ideal of development and progress ended up launching humanity into previously unimaginable levels of environmental degradation. Tragedies of nature caused by human beings, such as the melting of glaciers in the Arctic, collapses of power plants, such as the case of Brumadinho in Brazil, tsunamis and hurricanes such as in the case of Hurricane Katrina, will happen more and more frequently if there are no changes in the way in which these issues are approached and dealt with.

UNFPA (2021) predicts that the impact of climate change could double the need for humanitarian response by 2030. With the spread of migration due to climate change, which forces several families to seek better living conditions in other places, action on the part of international organizations will need to reach those affected, as in cases of victims of sexual violence and various other infractions concerning women's sexual and reproductive rights.

Considering that climate change affects women and men differently, and that among women, the poorest and those from poor countries suffer the impacts of global warming more seriously, currents have emerged that link feminism and ecology, among which we find ecofeminism¹.

The term “ecofeminism” was created by the French feminist activist Françoise D’Eaubonne, in the late 1970s, to designate, in general, a study of how feminist and ecological issues are intrinsically connected. The movement is philosophical, academic and activist, and emerged in response to a series of environmental disasters such as “Love Canal”, a city in Niagara Falls built on contaminated landfill and the nuclear disaster on “Three Mile Island”, in Pennsylvania, both in the United States (BOWEN, 2016). According to Bowen (2016), the sixties

¹ We emphasize that the concept of ecofeminism that we employ here is that, with a strong Marxist influence, it exposes the devastating relationships between patriarchy and capital accumulation through extractive logic, linking capitalist modes of production and reproductive control as forms of sovereignty over women and vulnerable populations, such as racialized people and those with lower purchasing power, defended by authors such as Mies (1986) and Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999).

saw the beginning of an environmental insurrection in which women were the majority among activists.

In this way, ecofeminism seeks to explain the different forms of oppression and their interconnections, which constitute society ordered under the patriarchal model, in such a way that women and nature occupy the axis of least value in opposition to men and the dominant culture (KUHNNEN, 2020). This conception reveals the existence of the same logic of domination based on hierarchical dualisms of value: racism, machismo, ableism, among others.

The concept deals with environmental justice from a gender perspective, and with the intersectional approach between race, ethnicity and geographic location, it allows understanding the different effects caused by global warming on different women, as well as ways to eliminate and create alternatives against oppression suffered in this context.

Minimamente, a natureza (usada intercambiavelmente neste ensaio com “o meio ambiente”) é uma questão feminista porque o entendimento da natureza e dos problemas ambientais frequentemente ajuda a entender como, e por que, a opressão das mulheres é conectada com a injustificada dominação ou exploração da natureza. [...] Por exemplo, dados mostram que mulheres – especialmente pobres e da zona rural em países menos desenvolvidos (LDCs – Less Developed Countries) as quais são chefes de família – sofrem danos desproporcionais causados tanto por problemas ambientais como desmatamento, poluição das águas e toxinas no meio ambiente. Saber isso ajuda a entender como as vidas e status das mulheres são conectados aos problemas ambientais contemporâneos (WARREN, 2015, p. 2)

However, it must be emphasized that women and ecology are not the same thing, for Puleo (2017, p. 27):

Ser ecofeminista não implica dizer que as mulheres são naturalmente mais conectadas à natureza e à vida do que os homens. Existem homens que devotam as suas vidas à defesa do meio-ambiente e/ou aos animais, e mulheres que são indiferentes ou hostis a essas novas formas de conhecimento. Entretanto, é verdade que, estatisticamente, em nível internacional, as mulheres são a maioria nos movimentos ligados ao meio ambiente e à defesa dos animais.

According to the author, historically, from a Western perspective of the middle class, women were tied to caring roles, whether for children, the elderly or the sick, and maintaining the domestic structure, without access to public life (PULEO, 2017). For her, when these characteristics are connected with appropriate information and a critical analysis of hegemonic discourses, fertile ground is created for the “awakening” of interest in defending nature and other living beings. On the other hand, emphasizing women's identity as mothers linked to nature can lead to a return to the principle of free motherhood and as a personal choice, and caution must be exercised to avoid making this mistake.

Given the context of environmental destruction, the extractive/patriarchal mode of production and its consequences for nature and the communities that are destroyed, are the main focuses of criticism made by feminists regarding the environmental issue, with the emergence of ecologies feminists.

This critique includes the devaluation of social and ecological reproduction as opposed to the excessive valuation of capital production and its impacts on nature and the lives of girls and women. Marxist feminists and ecofeminists point to the inseparability between economic production and social reproduction, capitalist accumulation is carried out through the

exploitation of things that are left outside the economic sphere, such as nature and reproduction (OJEDA et. al, 2022).

Ecological feminists inspired by feminist Marxism have also questioned the neat separation between workers and communities within capitalism, while once again reminding us of the inseparability of production and social reproduction. This has clear implications for resource management, conservation, and ecology given the ways that life and living worlds are often segmented [...]. (OJEDA et al 2022, p.157)

As the private domain is considered non-economic and therefore gendered as feminine, in the capitalist and patriarchal society whose model of extractive exploitation causes several losses to countless communities, especially in the colonized global South, feminist ecologies, such as ecofeminism, bring to the debate the different ways in which gender shapes accumulation processes.

According to Giffin (1991), the fact that women had a uterus meant giving birth, historically interpreted by men (doctors, jurists or politicians), this meant that there would be a perfect correspondence between their bodies and their social functions. It turns out that since the end of the 20th century, women, mainly white and middle class, began to undertake a double journey with their entry into the job market: in the public sphere (paid work) and in the private/domestic sphere (unpaid work)².

O movimento das mulheres ignorou de modo amplo a questão da reprodução ou ofereceu soluções individuais, como compartilhar o trabalho doméstico, o que não fornece uma alternativa às batalhas isoladas que muitas de nós temos realizado. Mesmo durante a campanha em favor do aborto, a maioria das feministas lutou apenas pelo direito de não ter filhos, embora este seja somente um lado do controle sobre nosso corpo e escolhas reprodutivas. Mas, e se quisermos ter filhos, mas não pudermos nos dar o luxo de criá-los, a não ser à custa de não termos tempo para nós mesmas e estarmos continuamente atormentadas por preocupações financeiras? (FEDERICI; 2019, p. 120, 121)

Veronica Gago (2019; 2020) explains that the processes of capital appreciation and accumulation combined with the logic of colonialist extractivism harmed women in the global South even more seriously due to the mode of colonial exploitation. In direct dialogue with Federici³ (2019), she problematizes the capitalist mode of production and the devaluation of reproductive work, exploitation and extraction in the face of feminist struggles, taking these as an antidote to neoliberalism.

The valorization of reproductive work is linked to the realization of reproductive rights and the recognition of reproductive self-determination. According to UNFPA, the right to reproductive self-determination is based on the following tripod: the right to plan one's own family, the right to make a reproductive decision free from interference and the right to be free from all forms of violence, discrimination and coercion that affect women's sexual and reproductive health. In order to achieve this ideal, it is necessary to understand the relationship

² Before that, since slavery in the period of European colonization over the Americas, Africa, and Asia, in the 16th and 18th centuries, black women had already experienced problems in this sense, because they had to take care of their employers' homes and their children in an environment in which they were enslaved.

³ Federici (2019) explains that the Marxist critique is incomplete if it is not understood that feminized forms of work, such as care work, feminized bodies and spaces for making political choices are usurped by capitalism.

between population and climate change, in order to guard against fallacies propagated by agents who directly benefit from this. For Puleo (2017), ecofeminism must advocate the free determination of bodies by women.

And this is what feminist ecologies that start from a Marxist perspective aim to achieve. Its future involves a clear position in favor of women's right to freely decide about their bodies and reproduction. Women need to be recognized as active subjects in decision-making processes, especially with regard to reproductive issues: whether or not they will have children, when they will give birth and in what way (PULEO, 2017).

The so-called developed countries destroyed their fauna and flora through predatory exploitation of the environment and began to turn their attention to peripheral countries, using the cheap labor present in these places and embarking on a new campaign of destruction, now in foreign territory. The standard of living in rich countries is not subject to export to the rest of the planet, given its destructive nature, natural resources are thus consumed without considering the possibility of their replacement in the future.

However, global warming will affect the world as a whole, and for this, only through joint efforts will it be possible to overcome the situation experienced today. Despite affecting everyone, environmental impacts affect populations with lower socioeconomic conditions differently, whose intersections of inequalities sometimes overlap, sometimes tangential, as occurs with gender, race, geographic location, age and abilities.

To build a conscious and egalitarian ecological culture, it is necessary to review the traditions and customs assimilated from the global North and its development model, which has proven unsustainable to replicate in other regions. So far, society has shown itself to be unfair both to women and to nature as a whole. From feminist ecologies in dialogue with reproductive justice, we can begin to change this.

4 CONSIDERAÇÕES FINAIS

The sexual division of labor and the feminization of poverty prevent women from accessing spaces of power, with the repeated suppression of their demands. Thus, their sexual and reproductive rights, already affected under normal conditions, suffer even more restrictions when an environmental catastrophe occurs.

We understand that patriarchy and capitalism are inseparable phenomena that need to be analyzed within the environmental panorama, considering that they support the oppressive vision that places women as subordinate to men and the Global South as subordinate to the North, in the same way that authorizes and encourages the exploitation of nature as a simple object by those who hold power.

The use of feminist ecologies anchored in the Marxist perspective allows the understanding of this correlation of power and from this, allows choices to be made in favor of reproductive justice and environmental justice, in order to reduce the various harms caused directly, or indirectly, by climate change to women in the global South.

It is important to analyze the intersection of environment and gender. Feminist ecologies aim to shed light on this intersection, especially given that women are the most severely affected by climate change and environmental disasters. Women must therefore play

a more active role in the decision-making processes related to the environment. Both men and women must work together to reduce gender, social, and environmental inequalities, and thereby move towards achieving reproductive and environmental justice.

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