

--- 1st December week ---
Third Edition



EXPLOR2ING

CENTURY

Approaches of sustainable initiatives and degrowth in Hungary

ECOFEMINISM

Sziasztok,

We are Tom, Enora and Perrine, three students in Sciences Po Rennes and currently trainees at Cargonomia, a social cooperative in Budapest.

We are currently facing an ecological crisis raising, among others issues, political, social and economical questions. The current system is calling for indefinite growth whereas the planet has boundaries and limited resources. So, when we asked ourselves about sustainable solutions and alternatives, degrowth caught our attention. Then we would like to learn from people who theorize about degrowth, put it into practice, but also from those who engage in ways that degrowth is likely to support.

This series of weekly papers are aimed to discover different fields of degrowth by interviewing people more or less related to it. Today, for the third edition of *EXPLOR2ING : Approaches of sustainable initiatives and degrowth in Hungary*, we are talking about ecofeminism with Anna MARGIT, an ecofeminist, creator of a community space (see photo above) and an open gardening area in Budapest.

ANNA MARGIT

How would you introduce yourself ?

That's a tricky question haha I guess I'm a gardener. I'm making this garden outside to cultivate plants and, at the same time, I'm cultivating a little community, and sowing seeds of ideas. I also do a bunch of stuff about veganism which is also about sowing little seeds in people's minds by making delicious food.

Before gardening, I studied architecture, and I was an architect for a while. I studied in France in Versailles (École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Versailles) and lived there for six years, it was really nice ! Then I moved to New-York and worked in an office I really liked. Finally, I moved to Budapest where things are much easier, I think.

How do your studies influence you in everyday life in Hungary ?

I studied mainly architecture, and a little bit of art history. It was great ! Being an architect is criticizing how things are and offering something better. That's definitely what I'm doing now. It was about understanding how the world works from different perspectives. We studied also anthropology, sociology, history and cinema... It wasn't much about them telling us what the problem is but much more, us having to find it and then suggest solutions to it. And now it's similar with ecofeminism, it's about criticizing an entire world and how the system works and then trying to come up with little or big solutions.

Could you give us your definition of ecofeminism ?

I usually have a lot of definitions ready in my head because people often ask it, but right now I'm thinking of many things at once. So it's a critic of the current system that we live in, this patriarchal heteronormative capitalist society where everything is in dualism. This division is really useful to prevent people to act as a community. So of course we have women and men, nature and culture, cities and countryside... That's how capitalism is able to work by turning people against each other creating hierarchy. So ecofeminism is criticizing these whole things.



But it's not just criticizing the oppression of nature and women and connecting the two things, it's also coming up with alternatives. It's much more about actions and finding solutions than a very critical theory. For example, doing nice things like gardening in community, making our own stuff, and start sustaining ourselves.

"It's not just criticizing the oppression of nature and women and connecting the two things, it's also coming up with alternatives."

According to you, what are capitalism and patriarchy ?

It's a system of oppression to me, that's my short answer.

How did you come across ecofeminism, a current of thought born of the conjunction of feminist and environmentalist thinking ?

It was in New-York, because the awful things we do to nature are much more visible there. Just going to the supermarket was very depressing and the capitalism was much more visible. Also I guess, because I watched very critical American documentaries about it, even if it's probably just as bad here in Europe, about factory farming and how we treat animals.

Could you tell us more about your ecofeminist garden and this community space ?

There are just small steps, it didn't start like "ok so we are going to change the world and do this ecofeminist community". But we had quite big ideas when we moved here with someone I knew from New-York. We first started this space as an art space.

Luckily, somehow, there was this huge piece of land on the other side that I was looking through my window. I was a bit hesitant at first, but then I thought it was stupid to do nothing. So I made a call and explained that I wanted to do a garden. They were delighted and answered "oh fantastic!". Actually they have been trying to sell it for twenty years but unsuccessfully. So I have probably a few more years to go.

I started the garden wondering how to do it in the most enjoyable way. It's not really a community garden in the sense that they are not separated plots and everyone has to garden in its own corner. It's about having this big space that can welcome people ideas and gardening. We had some technical issues but still we wanted to try, so we launched the project.

We got everything that we needed from the city. For example we got all the soil and everything for mulching for free from different places. The soil is some of composted horse manure. We got a bunch of leaves from a green waste company, which brought it here for free. Usually, they have to pay to give it to composting facilities.

A lot of people came to help, because it was just after Covid and they were so happy to do something somewhere. But then in the summer, it was really hot and dry. We kind of let it die because I couldn't take care of it. I just started again today.

"For me it's important to have preserved natural areas in the city. [...] It's a sort of advocacy work to preserve it."

For me, it's super important to have preserved natural areas in the city because they used to cut down a lot of natural places. It's a sort of advocacy work to preserve it. Now, this garden is also a home for a lot of birds and insects. Before, people could come to this nice wild place in the city and host some events, but it turned really into an ecofeminist space with events I believe in (ecofeminist festivals...). I didn't want to be burn-out with too different projects. Now, I also want to face it with people I know in Budapest and think about projects together. The plan is to have some kind of urban farm, keep hosting people's ideas and having this community space out there.

ECOFEMINISMS IN THEORY

You talked about the dualistic conception of the world, especially about nature/culture. Why is this conception problematic for ecofeminism ?

It's just very destructive how we imagine being above nature because, as I was saying before, this dualistic concept is good for putting a hierarchy between and among people. If we don't see nature as our equal and we think that we are much smarter, then we are not respecting all the other creatures, and we just destroy everything. That's just not working for anyone, that's why I think it's problematic.

There is not one ecofeminism, but many ecofeminisms who claim new relationships between nature and women. Do you think that a central issue of constructivist ecofeminism is to get out of both essentialist ecofeminist thinking and materialist feminist thinking ?

I'm really against, of course, the essentialist concept, there isn't middle ground with it. I understand that if women have been told to be kind and submissive they just want to say "no fuck it, I'm gonna be aggressive, dominant, awful, go working in a big company and being evil boss just like men", but it's not really helpful. That's not good either to say that women are closer to nature because it's putting back again this hierarchy only used to oppress people.

I think it's much more helpful, instead of taking on all of this kind of men associated characteristics, to say that men can also be closer to nature... Actually, they are part of nature. We should teach men to be a little bit more humble and not women to reject all of this so-called women characteristics.



Essentialist ecofeminism : Essentialist perception goes further than the oppression shared by women and nature. It presents a natural, biological and innate affinity between women and nature.

Constructivist ecofeminism : According to Yayo HERRERO*, "Women and nature are sustained by a social construct that involves the assignment of roles that give origin to the sexual division of labour and the distribution of power and property in patriarchal societies" . Women's relation with nature is a social construct.

Materialist / Socialist feminism : Current related to Marxist feminism, which links women oppression to capitalism and patriarchy. Gender is a social construct enforced by society.

Ecofeminism is meant to fight against patriarchy and capitalism, but do you agree with Vandana Shiva who says that actually the patriarchy is capitalism ?

I agree completely with her and I love everything she says ... haha ! I'm just usually quoting her on this haha... Patriarchy and capitalism are just two sides of the same coin. It's exactly what she was saying, it couldn't be really working without each other. Capitalism is only working because women are putting all this free work into sustaining the structure, and patriarchy is about dominating women who are working at home for free for example. Even if they are going to an office, they are still going home afterwards and doing a bunch of free housework, keeping the children all this stuff and making food...

"Patriarchy and capitalism are just two sides of the same coin."

What is the place of men in your community space and your garden ?

I can welcome them, but if they are not being respectful I don't feel like it's my job to go on and educate everyone one by one. I just don't have the patience for it. It would be nice to have this kind of patience but I'm more interesting in doing other stuff. I have a few male friends who are nice and they are not being too patronizing or whatever so of course they can come. People can come but I'm being quite strict with them when they are being rude. And they don't come back...

[...] But on the other hand, I had a different experience once. I was working in Ibiza. My job was to cook vegan food and to talk to a whole team building, composed mainly of men, about ecofeminism. There I made my mission to talk to them, be kind, empathetic and not angry. And it worked ! People were so curious, and it took me two minutes to make them understand what is it about. They got unbored and I wish I could do that all the time, even if I usually can't.

But don't you think Vandana Shiva* can be seen as an essentialist ecofeminist ?

Oh actually that's true... haha.. now that I'm thinking about it yeah ...maybe... I really like her haha !

Well, I don't know but while you were saying that, I was thinking that she always says that, specifically women have this power and they're closer to nature, that's true... Now I remember it, clearly. Maybe she meant it in a different way, thinking that there is a kind of woman in everyone, and it's much more about naturing or being a nurturing person ... who could also be a man ! That's it's not existing in most men anymore because culture erases it from men. And it's true that women are historically closer to nature, because that is always what they were educated to, but not because of a certain unborn essential ... magical something. Maybe that's what she meant...

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What links can you make between the LBTIQ+ issues and ecofeminism ?

It works the same way. The whole queer community has been called to be closer to nature just like women so it implies that ecofeminism can't really work without being intersectional. It's also about observing how people of colour are oppressed and how accurate communities have been traditionally identified closer to nature. And there is a very interesting ambiguity because they were associated closer to nature, but at the same time they were called unnatural. So because of similar oppression it's important to call out. Most members of the queer community are fighting against this duality between genders, and against how we traditionally understand what a man and a woman is. There are many relevant perspectives on what gender can be and how we can destroy this dualistic approach which is supporting the capitalist heteronormative society. There is an important work that people from queer communities are doing to break these dualistic categories, such as the work of a transwoman I met in a festival in Ibiza, doing so much for changing people ideas.

What scientific approach can we have of nature as eco-feminists, when the objective of science is to put nature at the human-being service, according to the philosopher Francis Bacon*?

I don't believe that science is only objective, because it's done by people who have a certain point of view on the world. I'm reading this really exciting book, "Sexing the body - Gender politics and the construction of the sexuality"*, written by Anne Fausto-Sterling, on gender and the history of science. For her, every kind of scientific approach is of course based on some kind of cultural context. And many things actually that we think about on nature or gender are very much rooted in a social cultural background. We refuse it in itself, but it's objective data. Of course I'm not saying that I'm against science, I just don't think we should give this ultimate power to science like if it was some kind of new religion. And it could also be native people knowledges, not only research made by white and middle-age man. We should be more cautious about scientific findings and examining the context that they are coming out of.

In the other side, what do you think of the spiritualist current of thought in ecofeminism ?

Well, I'm a bit worried about it, but I don't know, there are so many different spiritualisms around... I went to an spiritual hippie crystal mountain ecofeminist festival once, and actually, it was awful. It was a mockery of indigenous cultures. So often, I feel when it's the spiritual current of ecofeminism it's just a lot of stolen knowledge.

What is the place of the figure of the witch in ecofeminist movements ?

They are just using the word "witch" for any women technically. I don't have some kind of mystical or spiritual connection to this figure. It's just really interesting to read about history of witches and how religious or political movements took power out of women's hands who had a connection to nature or to their body. So for me "witch" is an umbrella term for women who had any kind of relationship to their bodies or nature and who weren't above them.

ECOFEMINISM AND DEGROWTH

What links do you make between degrowth and ecofeminism ? Does ecofeminism have to be a degrowth movement, by its fights against capitalism and patriarchy ?

I think it has to be a degrowth movement, or we just have to reconsidered what we call growth, which is not necessarily growing profits, building more stuff or having more materialistic things... Because capitalism is about making more stuff that we need, and reconsidering what we need is the whole point of ecofeminism : making as much as we need, and not more... It's much more about growing differently, I don't know, like you can use the word growing in a lot of nice ways too, like growing closer to nature, growing vegetables, or personal growth ... so I think we can reclaim the word "growth".

How do you use the word degrowth, therefore ?

Well I don't really use it so much because we don't really use it in Hungarian... But according to me, it's about rejecting production of stuff that we don't need, that's how I use it to reconsider what we actually need and what is essential for us. So yeah, for me it's about reconsidering what we actually need and how we use the resources that we have.

What would be the concrete practical steps towards ecofeminist society ?

Well, I think it would be important to teach people to be more self-sustainable, self-subsistent ... It doesn't mean that everyone should be able to do everything for himself because, then, you don't do things in community It's more about living in a community and being empathetic and curious of people who live around you... It really starts by gathering in smaller groups, figuring out how to make things, and refusing one by one things that are inherently part of capitalism, like buying products that's coming from far away. We are putting so much time and energy into things that are not worth it, thinking always about how to maximise our time, how to produce more... We should become a bit more humble and "waste" time on unnecessary things, like making your plant milk or from your own cows. I think it would be a good step.

Could we use free time from four work days a week for what you talked about, and stop doing bullshit jobs ?

Yeah and not doing a bullshit job four days a week either. I'm very lucky and privileged not having a bullshit job. I made it happen but of course, as a white woman, it was easier than for a gipsy woman who is living in the countryside and has six children.... I quit my architect job because at the end of the day we were using bunch of super polluting raw material and making castles for rich people. Now my job is about making vegan food, hosting workshops, gardening out there and renting out this space by gathering money from random spaces. I'm happy that people spend it here rather than, I don't know, buying some stuff at Ikea haha !

I am feeling that it's important what I'm doing and that things are better even if it's nothing huge. I wish that more people could just start hosting workshops or making money of things they believe in instead of working in kind of visible companies....

There is a debate regarding the relationship between women and power. According to you, should women be powerful ?

I think it would be nice to really find what power means. It doesn't need to mean that we are dominating other people and being mean and unempathetic. I think women should have more power, but a different one. It can be the power to teach things to a kid who is going to grow up, and transform the world.... It's also the power to be able to grow your own vegetables, and not relying on supermarkets and capitalism. Or to collect plant medicines and use them... And men also should have more power.

What about men and power ?

They should have a kind of "soft power", let's call it this way. In a way, they should behave more like women too. So, definitely, we should redefine what power means : not the power over nature and people, but power of using things or getting out of the capitalist system...

"So, definitely, we should redefine what power means : not the power over nature and people but power of using things or getting out of the capitalist system...."

In a degrowth society what form of living organisation do you imagine ?

I have no idea because I'm not very good at working in a community so far... I am getting better and I am working in a community of course, but I grew up also very individualistic like most of us.

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I went to the same normal schools and I was always kind of considered as the man in the family. I was always told that I was so much better than everyone else and so strong that I could do anything, which is a nice thing, but it's also a lot of men characteristic we put on me... So I'm really learning with this whole garden project how to work in a community and how to trust people.

When people are trusted and being seen with empathy, everyone can be part of the ecosystem that a group should be. It should be much more inclusive with people with different abilities and different backgrounds, just somehow co-working, without anyone bossing people around.

"So I'm really learning with the whole garden project how to work in a community and how to trust people."

But I don't reject the idea of hierarchy, even if I may have been critical in the past... It is a learning process : for example during the first ecofeminist festival, we decided to organize it like a community with meetings on every wednesday. But it didn't work because not everyone had the same amount of energy to invest in it. It made me realise that if someone is distributing tasks or having some oversight in it, it doesn't have to be an aggressive power of dominating people, but it can actually help and enable people to participate.

Many more people were able to join the second festival. There was a much more diverse crowd than for the first event, not just young white women. It is just interesting to look at hierarchy power and how it can help and enable other people who aren't good at organising and overseeing an entire functioning group or festival's organisation, to participate. And it doesn't mean that you are not better than the others, maybe you are much better working on other stuff and tasks.

We often read that ecofeminism could be a part of the degrowth project* but according to you, could ecofeminism be a political project by itself ?

Yeah I think so, I mean it's hard because usually politics is about a different kind of power than ecofeminism is. So it's hard to imagine politics differently.

Ecofeminism is the most useful or majestic set of ideas, so of course I think that's the way that we should be going forward. It just takes us off of this pedestal that we put ourselves on. I don't think it is sustainable to think that we are above other species. It's called ecofeminism just to point out the domination of women and nature. Currently in this world, these are the biggest motors of problems and if we manage to solve that, maybe in the world where ecofeminism will be, we could use another political program. But for now it could be a political set up program because it's just about creating communities and seeing nature as part of us, or us being part of nature...

What do you want the world to look like in 50 years ?

It's a hard question, well...about all this duality I was talking about, just simply people not having to conform so much to such groups, and nature and culture not being separated. Just being done with all this dualism, I think. That was the short answer.

REVIEW OF INTERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

The exchange with Anna Margit made it possible to question ecofeminism in theory and in practice. Here are some concluding remarks and analysis on this week's topic.

Expectations :

- We wanted to understand ecofeminist currents. We suspected a plurality and complexity of revendications. We were wondering about her personal belonging, affiliation to a specific current.
- We expected historical explanations about the cultural relationships between women and nature.
- We were sceptical and questioning some aspects of ecofeminist movements such as the spiritualism.
- We were curious about the relationships between Degrowth and ecofeminism.
- We wished to ask the feasibility of ecofeminism as a future political project.

Remarks :

- Global learnings regarding ecofeminisms -

- There isn't one ecofeminism. It is complex to have a global overview and an in-depth knowledge of all ecofeminist currents, movements and revendications.
- An issue raised by both Anna Margit and Alexandra Köves is about the understanding of technology and science as a product of its time. Science is a social construction representative of a society which is shaped by cultural factors.

- There are complexities and paradoxes about ecofeminism. We are still in a learning process regarding these theories and we still have questions (regarding the presupposed links between queer people and nature for example).

- Anna Margit's opinion and what we want to highlight -

- Anna Margit, from what we understand is much more into a concrete and practical approach of ecofeminism through her community gardening. It's always evolving, looking for some new projects.
- It was interesting to have her point of view about relationships between ecofeminisms and degrowth. For example, the fact that she is calling for a reconsideration of the word "growth" associating it to positive aspects.
- The issue of education is still and always raised, but from a different perspective. It is about gender education and moving away from the dualistic perception of our world, including so-called "feminine" and "masculine" behaviours. But most importantly it raises the question of self-education on certain subjects.

New questions / challenges :

- What would be the concrete steps to reach an ecofeminist society ?
- What about the main social fights and ecofeminist movements in the so-called "South"? What are the relationships with "Northern" ecofeminisms ?
- How could we reconcile all ecofeminist thoughts in a global society project ? Should we really coordinate all of them ?

APPENDIX

- **"Sexing the body - Gender politics and the construction of sexuality"**, Anne FAUSTO-STERLING, 2000, : <https://libcom.org/files/Fausto-Sterling%20-%20Sexing%20the%20Body.pdf>
- **"Un podcast à soi - Écoféminisme 1er volet : Défendre nos territoires"** (21), *Arte Radio*, 06/11/2019, Charlotte BIENAIMÉ, 56'22
https://www.arteradio.com/son/61662635/ecofeminisme_1er_vollet_defendre_nos_territoires_21
- **"Emilie Hache : Pour les écoféministes destruction de la nature et oppression des femmes sont liées"**, *Reporterre, le quotidien de l'écologie*, 18/10/2016 : <https://reporterre.net/Emilie-Hache-Pour-les-ecofeministes-destruction-de-la-nature-et-oppression-des-femmes>
- **"Eco-féminisme, science et décroissance. Entretien avec Yayo Herrero"**, *Contretemps*, Pablo BATALLA CUETO, 08/01/2019, <https://www.contretemps.eu/herrero-ecofeminisme-science-decroissance/>
- **Ecofeminism** : "Ecological feminist perspectives exploring and advocating emancipation from Western patriarchal domination of both women and ecosystems. A key principle of degrowth applied by acknowledging needs for gender equality, engagement of all in care of people and nature, thus deconstructing gender identities and roles associated with domination and exploitation", *Exploring Degrowth - A Critical Guide*, Anitra NELSON, Vincent LIEGEY, Pluto Press, August 2020
- **Ecofeminist figures mentioned** :
 - **Françoise d'EAUBONNE** : French ecofeminist who first coined the term "ecofeminism" in her book "Le féminisme ou la mort". Goldblum Caroline, « Françoise d'Eaubonne, à l'origine de la pensée écoféministe », *L'Homme & la Société*, 2017/1-2 (n° 203-204), p. 189-202.: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-l-homme-et-la-societe-2017-1-page-189.htm>
 - **Vandana SHIVA** : "a world-renowned environmental thinker, activist, feminist, philosopher of science, writer and science policy advocate, is the founder of Navdanya Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology in India and President of Navdanya International. <https://vandanashivamovie.com/vandana-shiva/about-vandana-shiva/> Writer of "Ecofeminismo : Teoría, crítica, perspectivas" with Maria Mies
 - **Yayo HERRERO** : "a Spanish anthropologist, engineer, professor and activist known for her expertise in ecofeminism and ecosocialism at European level". <https://www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu/article-author/yayo-herrero/>
- **Szeszegyár Facebook Account** : <https://www.facebook.com/Szeszgyar1>
- **Facebook Page of the Second Szeszegyár ecofeminist festival** - <https://pages.facebook.com/events/1295003934248534>