

Feminist Entrepreneurship: A Critique of the Capitalist Economic System

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Abstract

This study presents a literature review on feminist entrepreneurship as a critique of the capitalist economic system, which often fails to uphold gender justice and ecological sustainability. The study draws on academic journals, books, and reports that examine the socio-economic and environmental consequences of capitalism particularly in relation to gender. The data were analyzed thematically using a feminist critical theory framework, with a focus on ecofeminism. The findings suggest that feminist entrepreneurship offers an alternative model that prioritizes not only economic outcomes but also values of solidarity, inclusivity, and sustainability. It seeks to challenge and transform discriminatory economic structures by empowering women, redistributing resources, and promoting community-based business models. Feminist entrepreneurship also elevates the importance of care work and ecological stewardship – elements often marginalized in capitalist systems. This paper argues that feminist entrepreneurship can serve as a strategic response to gender inequality and contribute to the development of a more inclusive and human-centered economy. Ultimately, it reflects the author's engagement in discursive resistance to capitalism and calls for the creation of a more equitable economic paradigm.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Feminism, Capitalism

Abstrak

Tulisan ini merupakan tinjauan pustaka mengenai kewirausahaan feminis sebagai bentuk kritik terhadap sistem ekonomi kapitalis yang kerap gagal menjamin keadilan gender dan keberlanjutan ekologi. Studi ini mengkaji jurnal akademik, buku, dan laporan yang membahas dampak sosial, ekonomi, dan lingkungan dari kapitalisme, khususnya dalam kaitannya dengan isu-isu gender. Data dianalisis secara tematik menggunakan kerangka teori kritis feminis, dengan fokus pada ekofeminisme. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kewirausahaan feminis menawarkan model alternatif yang tidak hanya berorientasi pada keuntungan ekonomi, tetapi juga menjunjung nilai



solidaritas, inklusivitas, dan keberlanjutan. Kewirausahaan ini bertujuan untuk menantang dan mentransformasi struktur ekonomi yang diskriminatif melalui pemberdayaan perempuan, redistribusi sumber daya, dan pengembangan model bisnis berbasis komunitas. Selain itu, kewirausahaan feminis mengangkat pentingnya kerja perawatan dan kepedulian ekologis – unsur yang sering diabaikan dalam sistem kapitalistik. Tulisan ini berargumen bahwa kewirausahaan feminis dapat menjadi strategi penting dalam mengatasi ketimpangan gender dan mendorong terbentuknya sistem ekonomi yang lebih inklusif dan berpusat pada nilai-nilai kemanusiaan. Pada akhirnya, tulisan ini juga merepresentasikan keterlibatan penulis dalam resistensi diskursif terhadap kapitalisme dan menyerukan perlunya pembangunan sistem ekonomi alternatif yang lebih adil di masa depan.

Kata Kunci: Kewirausahaan, Feminisme, Kapitalis

INTRODUCTION

Capitalism as the dominant economic system in the world has produced progress in various aspects. However, behind these achievements, capitalism has also caused significant problems, including for women and the environment. As we understand, capitalism is oriented towards unlimited economic growth, often ignoring social and ecological sustainability in favor of capital accumulation.

The capitalist economic system not only deepens gender inequality, but also accelerates environmental degradation (Hornborg, 2001). Capitalism relies on class exploitation, reinforcing patriarchal structures (Eisenstein, 2004). In addition, Capitalism utilizes women's labor in various forms, both in the formal and informal sectors, without providing equal rewards (Mohanty, 2013). Women are one of the most vulnerable groups in this system. The exploitation of women's labor is particularly evident in low-wage sectors, such as manufacturing and service industries, where women are often placed in monotonous, risky, and under protected jobs.

The wage gap between men and women remains an important issue in the international economy. A report by the International Labour Organization shows that this gap is wider among the top 1 percent of workers, where women are often underrepresented in high-earning positions. Within the top 1 percent, men earn almost twice as much as their female counterparts (International Labour Organization., 2017). In addition, a report by Economic Co-operation and Development revealed that women aged 65 and over receive an average retirement income 26% lower than men, reflecting the cumulative impact of the wage gap over their working lives (Economic Co-operation and Development,

2021). Based on data (Economic Policy Institute, 2024), women were paid 21.8% less on average than men in 2023.

In Indonesia, research in West Kalimantan in 2021 found the average wage of men was IDR 2,212,577 and women IDR 1,882,086, with a gap of IDR330,491. Of the total gap, 64.19% was due to explainable factors, such as education and work experience, while 35.81% was due to discrimination (Setyowati et al., 2024). This data shows that the gender pay gap remains a global challenge that requires continuous efforts to achieve equality.

In addition to the wage gap, women have long accepted the risk of double burden when working in factories or the public. On the one hand, they have to perform unpaid domestic roles, and on the other hand, they are expected to work in the formal sector to support the family economy. This phenomenon reflects how capitalism reinforces gender injustice through layered exploitation (Lamali, 2024).

Apart from women, the environment is the most exploited resource by capitalism. After all, capitalism cannot grow without adequate environmental support. However, because of this, practices such as deforestation, mining, and the use of fossil fuels have damaged ecosystems, including biodiversity loss and climate change. Worse still, poorly managed industrial waste pollutes the soil, water and air. Therefore, capitalism has actually shown its inability to create a balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability (Ishengoma, 2021).

This paper seeks to offer feminism as a perspective that needs to be integrated in the capitalist economic system. The feminist approach sees how capitalism and patriarchy collaborate in the exploitation of women and the environment. Women, especially in indigenous and rural communities, rely heavily on nature to fulfill their basic needs. Environmental damage caused by capitalism, such as deforestation and water pollution, directly affects their lives. Women in these communities often lose access to natural resources that they previously managed traditionally. This situation shows how capitalism not only damages ecosystems, but also deprives women who depend on the environment of their independence.

This paper seeks to emphasize through a feminist perspective that the role of women is closely linked to environmental resilience and sustainability. This can be seen from the many cases where they are at the forefront of the environmental movement against capitalist exploitation practices. The ecofeminism perspective highlights how women have a close relationship with nature, both as guardians of ecosystem sustainability and as actors of social

change. Women's struggles to protect the environment often involve battles against capitalist forces that seek to control resources.

Departing from several reports and research results related to the issue of women and environmental damage above, it is important to reconstruct a new view that is critical of the work of capitalism. This paper also seeks to explain the patterns of injustice produced by capitalism and patriarchy, and to formulate a more just and sustainable strategy for women and the environment through an ecofeminism perspective. With an approach that focuses on social and ecological justice, this research paper is expected to contribute to efforts to build a critical perspective in encouraging the birth of a more inclusive and sustainable system.

METHOD

This research uses a literature review to reveal the weaknesses of capitalism in accommodating the presence of women and environmental issues. This method aims to collect, review, various relevant literatures, in the form of books, journal articles, related reports, and previous studies that discuss issues related to capitalism, gender, and the environment. Data sources were obtained from the Google Scholar academic database by using the keyword structure in turn capitalism, women, and the environment. The data collected was thematically analysed to identify key patterns such as the marginalization of women in the economic system, exploitation of natural resources, and neglect of sustainability aspects. Data synthesis was conducted with a critical approach using the theoretical frameworks of critical economics and ecofeminism, which helped understand the relationship between capitalism, patriarchy, and environmental degradation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Critique of the Capitalistic Economic System

Based on a search of various literatures, this paper aims to show the problematic aspects of the capitalist economic system.

1. Neglect of Women in the Capitalist Economic System

Capitalism has ignored the role and contribution of women in the economic system (Gimenez, 2005). This can be seen from various data and research results that show this fact. This is inseparable from the patriarchal way of working. Such a perspective considers women's work, especially domestic work, as economically worthless because it does not produce direct benefits (Lynch, 2021).

Some jobs that are not considered work in the capitalist sense, such as childcare, cooking, or caring for the elderly are not counted in the capitalist meaning of work (Finch, 2022). Even though these activities are the backbone of the sustainability of society, as a result, women's economic contributions are marginalized, while they continue to face a double burden: working in the formal sector for low wages while carrying out domestic responsibilities (Kabeer, 2021).

In other conditions, capitalism often uses women as cheap labor in certain sectors, such as the textile or manufacturing industries (Rose, 1987). Based on a report from the World Bank in *Women, Business, and the Law* (2024), no country in the world provides equal opportunities for women, especially in the work environment (World Bank., 2024). In many developing countries, women work in exploitative conditions, with long working hours, low wages, and minimal legal protection. This system not only harms women economically, but also exacerbates gender inequality.

Wage inequality and discrimination in the world of work is one of the main impacts of capitalism that worsens women's position in society. Women often receive lower wages than men despite performing work of equal value and responsibility (Treiman, 1981; Branch, 1994; Wagner, 2022). This inequality is exacerbated by women's lack of access to high-paying sectors, such as technology or upper management, where men still dominate (Sholikin, 2024).

In addition, women face challenges in the form of a double burden due to the patriarchal capitalist system (Folbre, 2021). After being responsible for the domestic sphere, at the same time they are also encouraged to work outside the home to fulfil the family's economic needs.

2. Capitalism: The Architect of Environmental Destruction

Capitalism also shows great weakness in accommodating environmental issues (Newell, 2013). The logic of capitalism, which is oriented towards unlimited economic growth, contradicts the fact that natural resources are limited (Altvater, 2007). This system encourages the massive exploitation of nature to meet production and consumption needs, without considering the long-term impact on the ecosystem (Kovel, 2021).

Deforestation, air and water pollution, and climate change are direct results of unsustainable capitalist economic activity (Marques, 2020). This dimension can be found in extractive industries such as mining and oil, which often damage the environment and harm local communities (Atapattu, 2018). Ironically, capitalism creates solutions that are often partial or cosmetic, such as green washing where companies claim to be environmentally friendly without actually changing their destructive business practices (Jones, 2019).

On the other hand, women are also the most vulnerable to the impacts of the ecological crisis caused by capitalism. The exploitation of natural resources for the pursuit of unlimited profits causes environmental damage, such as climate change and land degradation, which directly affects the lives of women, especially in rural communities. They are often responsible for meeting the water, food and energy needs of their families, so when these resources become scarce, their workload increases drastically. This exacerbates gender inequality as women face not only economic and domestic challenges, but also a heavy ecological burden.

These issues are interconnected and demonstrate how capitalism not only creates economic inequality but also reinforces social structures that place women at a disadvantage. Therefore, policies that support gender equality in the workplace, redistribution of domestic responsibilities, and sustainable approaches to natural resource management are needed to holistically address the negative impacts of capitalism on women.

Feminist Entrepreneurship as an Alternative

In feminist entrepreneurship, there is a strong critique of the exploitative business model that is at the core of patriarchal capitalism. Patriarchal capitalism not only exploits women's labor, but also often exploits the environment and natural resources for maximum profit (Oksala, 2018). This exploitation does not consider the long-term impacts, both on labor and the environment, which ends up disproportionately harming women.

Women are often the most affected by environmental degradation, as they tend to be more dependent on natural resources to sustain family and community life (Samandari, 2017). For example, women in rural areas are the primary custodians of resources such as water and food. They feel the most direct impact of environmental exploitation due to big business activities that operate within the framework of patriarchal capitalism. Therefore, feminist entrepreneurship rejects business approaches that damage the environment and local communities. Instead, they propose business models that are more sustainable and oriented towards social welfare.

In the third wave of feminism, ecofeminism was born, which sees the connection between oppression of women and exploitation of the environment. In her book entitled *Ecofeminism as politics: Nature, Marx and the postmodern* explains that ecofeminism departs from the understanding that the patriarchal system that dominates society, not only puts women in a subordinate position, but also treats nature as an object of exploitation (Salleh, 2017). This view leads us to understand that in a capitalistic global economic system, exploitative

business practices not only harm the environment but exacerbate gender inequality. Feminist entrepreneurship, within the framework of ecofeminism, seeks to counter this trend by integrating gender equity and environmental sustainability in the way of entrepreneurship.

Feminist entrepreneurship based on ecofeminism not only sees women as economic actors who need to be empowered, but also as guardians of nature who must be involved in environmental conservation efforts. Protection of women and the environment must go hand in hand. Businesses managed by women are believed to be more concerned about the ecological impact of their operations, especially in marginalized areas that are highly affected by environmental degradation.

Marginalized areas such as agrarian communities are the first to feel the adverse effects of environmental degradation, such as soil degradation, water pollution, and climate change (Yadav, 2018). Therefore, feminist entrepreneurship takes the form of sustainable and environmentally friendly businesses, such as organic products, renewable energy, or fashion that supports recycling and minimal waste.

Moreover, feminist entrepreneurship based on ecofeminism can carry out entrepreneurial activities that are friendly to ecological balance. Meanwhile, the business model proposed by Jacobs, M., in his article *Rethinking capitalism: Economics and policy for sustainable and inclusive growth* that capitalists are only oriented towards fast growth and maximum profit is seen as unfair, often at the expense of workers and the environment (Jacobs, 2016). As an alternative, feminist entrepreneurs choose business models that are more ethical and inclusive.

Ecofeminism also brings the discourse of environmental sustainability into feminist entrepreneurship, where nature and women are seen as an integral part of the web of life that must be respected and preserved (Holy, 2021). Feminist entrepreneurship will certainly treat nature as a partner, not an object to be exploited. Women who run feminist businesses run environmentally friendly production processes, either by maintaining the sustainability of natural resources or by producing goods that support more conscious and sustainable consumption patterns.

Feminist entrepreneurship promotes a more horizontal and participatory business model, where decision-making is done democratically, involving all parties in the company, regardless of gender. This is in contrast to patriarchal capitalism, which tends to centralize the power of individuals or small groups. This more collaborative structure allows women to play an active role in

strategic decision-making, giving them greater control over the direction of the business and the distribution of profits.

Contrary to patriarchal capitalism in terms of profit distribution, feminist entrepreneurship does not simply focus on profit accumulation. Instead, it encourages a more equitable redistribution of wealth, where profits are used to support the well-being of employees, communities, and especially environmental preservation. For example, many feminist entrepreneurs invest a portion of their profits in programs for women's empowerment, education, health, or environmental protection. The main purpose of this distribution is to reduce the social and economic inequalities created by patriarchal capitalism.

Feminist entrepreneurship highlights the importance of recognizing the value of domestic and care work. Care activities such as childcare, caring for the elderly, and maintaining the household are not only essential to the well-being of the family, but also support the smooth running of the economy as a whole. Without this care work, the formal workforce cannot function properly as they need support at home.

Feminist entrepreneurs are actors who are expected to create business models that support the recognition and integration of care work in the formal economy. For example, feminist-run companies offer affordable and quality childcare or eldercare services, enabling women to participate more fully in the workforce. Feminist entrepreneurship thus reduces the gap between productive and reproductive work that patriarchal capitalism has long perpetuated.

In the future, feminist entrepreneurship seeks to encourage the implementation of policies that allow women to balance professional work and care responsibilities, such as flexible working hours, extended maternity leave, and work arrangements that support work-life balance.

Feminist entrepreneurship is expected to serve as a driving force to create a more humane economic system, where social welfare and sustainability are prioritized. By challenging patriarchal capitalism and creating more inclusive business models. Feminist entrepreneurship not only helps to reduce gender inequality, but also strengthens the foundations for a more just, sustainable and socially just economy.

As a feminist construct oriented towards greater social change, it is necessary to consider more systematic methods and approaches. In order for feminist entrepreneurship to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially goals related to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Although there are many ideal indicators of how important feminist entrepreneurship is, it is also realized that its realization is not easy. This is

because there are various obstacles, both structural and those that live in society as culture. We can see the challenges of feminist entrepreneurship in two important aspects, namely cultural and structural (political) challenges. Cultural challenges include various social norms, stereotypes and biases that have long been embedded in society, which assume that men are more appropriate and more competent in leading businesses than women. As we know in a society hegemonized by patriarchal forces, women are still faced with the expectation that their main role is in the domestic sphere, taking care of the family, and not in the competitive business world.

This view leaves many women facing barriers and insufficient self-confidence plus a lack of social support to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions. Furthermore, deep-rooted gender bias often leads to women being perceived as less capable when it comes to risk-taking or complex business management. Where the business world is still widely perceived as a rational world identified with men. On the other hand, women are considered unfit because they are more dominant in their affective or emotional side. This cultural challenge is often internalized, causing women not only to deal with the complexity of the business world but also the stigma of society towards it.

The second challenge is the political aspect. Political challenges are equally important. This includes political attitudes and policies that are unfriendly towards women. Government policies in many countries are often not sufficiently supportive of women's entrepreneurship, whether in the form of discriminatory regulations or a lack of programs specifically designed to support women entrepreneurs.

For example, many women entrepreneurs do not have equal access to resources such as capital, training or business networks due to policies that are insensitive to gender equality issues. For example, complicated bureaucratic procedures or lack of transparency in access to government funding often exclude women entrepreneurs. The legal system and government policies still tend to be patriarchal, which reinforces women's subordinate position in society and the economy. In addition, the lack of representation of women in political decision-making positions also exacerbates this situation, as the resulting policies tend not to reflect the needs and challenges faced by women in entrepreneurship.

Political challenges also include a lack of support for issues relevant to women, such as social security, reproductive leave, or work flexibility, which are important for women who fulfill the dual roles of business leader and family caretaker. The lack of policies that support women entrepreneurs in

these aspects makes it difficult for them to compete in markets dominated by men, who are often not burdened by the same domestic responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

This study critically examines feminist entrepreneurship as a transformative critique of capitalist economic systems through a literature-based analysis. By integrating feminist critical theory and ecofeminism frameworks, the research highlights how mainstream economic paradigms perpetuate gender inequities and ecological degradation while marginalizing care work and communal resilience.

Three key findings emerge from this analysis. First, feminist entrepreneurship redefines economic success by prioritizing solidarity, inclusivity, and sustainability over profit maximization. Second, it serves as a vehicle for structural change by redistributing resources, empowering marginalized women, and fostering community-centered business models. Third, feminist entrepreneurship disrupts patriarchal-capitalist hierarchies by centering care work and ecological stewardship—values systematically devalued in conventional economic systems.

The article's novelty lies in its theorization of feminist entrepreneurship as both a counter-hegemonic practice and a holistic alternative to capitalist exploitation. By bridging feminist economics with environmental ethics, this framework challenges the artificial separation of economic, social, and ecological domains, advocating instead for an integrated approach to justice.

To advance this discourse, future research should prioritize intersectional analyses of feminist entrepreneurship across diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Additionally, empirical studies are needed to evaluate the long-term impacts of feminist entrepreneurial models on gender equity, ecological regeneration, and community resilience. Policy-oriented investigations could further explore regulatory frameworks to scale such initiatives while resisting capitalist co-optation. Lastly, interdisciplinary collaborations between feminist scholars, ecologists, and economists are recommended to develop actionable pathways for systemic economic transformation.

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