
Presentation

by

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In this issue dedicated to eco-feminism, the journal returns to certain topics already dealt with in previous issues, in particular those that discussed the environmental and social consequences of economic development (see, for example, the article on the Great Dams in India or the Special Issue dedicated to China). Broadening the topics, this issue examines the reflection carried out by feminists since the 1970s on the link between the oppression of women and dominance over nature; between patriarchy, scientific thought and capitalist development; between patriarchy and spirituality. Eco-feminism is a plural and inclusive movement that has been influenced by the battles fought by women all over the world to defend the environment, subsistence, and the dignity of all living beings. As well as peace, the movement focuses on relationships of domination (of gender, of class, of race) and the connections between all forms of life.

The articles in this issue deal with eco-feminism from a series of different disciplinary perspectives. Historians, theologians, anthropologists, physicists, philosophers and sociologists present a wide picture of the complexities and wealth of a thought that is evolving new ways of understanding economics, politics, democracy and ethics. The second part of the *Research* section is dedicated to case studies and dwells on the concrete issues posed by the economic and social changes in India, China and Africa.

In the *Introduction*, Bruna Bianchi reviews the development of these movements and of eco-feminist thought from the early 1970s. She sets out the themes dealt with and draws up a picture of the debate that took place both within eco-feminism and with other representatives of strands of ecological thought.

Elisabetta Donini highlights the multiplicity of environmental feminisms that evolved after the Chernobyl disaster. Indeed, this particular event encouraged the “awareness of limits” and “interdependence”, an awareness that is in sharp contrast with the importance given to the return to “growth” seen as an unavoidable necessity to heal the instabilities that are disrupting the lives of millions of people.

Greta Gaard, eco-feminist and animalist, surveys the eco-feminist theories that have grown in America and have led to the development of *Feminist Animal Studies*, a sector in which many scholars are both feminist activists and animal rights activists. She examines the mechanisms that unite control over women and animals, the latter being considered the model for all other forms of dominion.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, a North American theologian, describes the Christian theological system from a feminist perspective. This monotheist patriarchal religion, whose roots can be traced back to the ancient Middle East and

to Greek, Jewish and Roman thought, has encouraged and upheld innumerable ways of exploiting women and Nature. Ruether points to two levels of exploitation: cultural-symbolic and socio-economic. The former is an ideological superstructure that mirrors but above all confirms the latter. Two ethical imperatives are needed to overcome this logic of dominion: sustainability and the preferential option for the poor. Both these ethical imperatives require close attention to the impact of humans on the earth, from population issues to that of the economic imbalance that produces hunger and poverty.

Elizabeth Green, Protestant pastor and theologian, takes us through a re-interpretation of the relationship between women, creation, and nature. Her article can be considered from at least three points of view: history, epistemology, and socio-economic conditions. She also introduces the topic of Christian divinity, declined in a non-hierarchical fashion and overcoming the sexist dichotomy.

Carolyn Merchant is author of the book *The Death of Nature*, a fundamental reference point for eco-feminist thought. In her article entitled *Partnership*, she proposes a new environmental ethics: the ethics of partnership. The idea that nature and humans are partners, closely interrelated life companions, is the starting point for her theory. A new awareness is required to overcome the current disjunction between a voracious humanity and a plundered nature, an awareness that permits an authentic listening to nature. The ethics of partnership is a feminist ethics based on the concept of relationship, which is in turn founded on the idea of co-operation, respect, friendship and care. A re-narration of history is thus possible which, instead of reproducing the patriarchal version of the past and the present, welcomes the idea of male and female co-existence.

Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, anthropologist, presents the viewpoint of subsistence perspective, a new way of conceiving work and economy aimed at overcoming the market economy that destroys life. The movement towards what is necessary, to real material and concrete value, leads to a new sense of responsibility towards common goods.

Alicia Puleo, professor of ethical and political philosophy, sets out the evolution of eco-feminist thought in southern Europe, with particular reference to Spain and to links with South America. Puleo proposes a critical eco-feminism that connects with the Illuminist tradition, freed from the fetters of science and technology, which is useful to contrast oppressive theories and praxis.

Chiara Corazza, historian of political thought, analyses the affinities between the thought of Vandana Shiva and Joseph Kumarappa, focusing in particular on the role the material/feminine principle plays in the criticism of development. Imperatives such as co-operation, mutuality, care and service are the strongholds of a way of interpreting the everyday that refers to women and their ability to “sustain” the world. The interdependence between women and nature becomes unavoidable to overcome the distortions of capitalist and neoliberal economics.

In the section dedicated to *Cases* Silvia Federici, sociologist and feminist, returns to the topics she explores in the section dedicated to reflection entitled *Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, focusing on the African context.

. Federici examines a core theme for countries in the south of the world, Africa in particular: land ownership and women's rights. Law reforms that have modified traditional customs since the 1990s are in fact based on the discriminatory patriarchal principles that were upheld by colonial common law. Hence, African feminist movements tend to demand more severe laws that guarantee women's rights to landownership, as they are aware that these restrictions can favour a process of land privatization. Today African women are putting up a strong resistance to the plundering of land by foreign entrepreneurs, "reclaiming" land and cultivating it for subsistence, both in the villages and in the urban areas to which they have been forced to immigrate.

Manisha Rao, sociologist and scholar of the Appiko Indian environmental movement, focuses on the issues raised by the women's movements. She first presents an analysis of the Indian environmental and eco-feminist movements' approach to discrimination based on cast, class, and gender, and draws a picture of the distance between a women's movement led by economically-privileged women with access to education and a base movement aimed at reclaiming land and cultivations, defending subsistence economy.

The sociological study of Chinese women by Zhongda Yuan, a sociologist involved in the research project on the land rights of migrant women in China, investigates the most recent statistical and sociological data on the violation of these rights. He focuses on the attempts by state laws and policies to take into account local and popular customs, and gives us an insight into a hitherto impenetrable world.

In the *Documents* section, we publish an Italian translation of a 1922 article by Jane Addams, who examines several topics that anticipate those that will be dealt with later by eco-feminists.

The *Research Instruments* section, edited by Annalisa Zabonati and dedicated to eco-feminism and "animal issues", presents the work of four scholars and animal rights activists who focus on innovative theoretical issues regarding both feminist and animalist thought. The section closes with an up-dated sitography edited by Erika Battocchio.

To conclude, the section *Interviews and testimonies* contains an interview with the founders of the Colectivo Con-Spirando, which Maria Paz García Finch recorded at Santiago in Chile. This is preceded by a history of this eco-feminist collective by Rossella Covelli.