

Françoise d'Eaubonne:

WHAT COULD AN ECO-FEMINIST SOCIETY BE?

From *Liberty, Equality and Women?* Anthology, (Harmattan) 1990

Translated from the French by Jacob Paisain

'Feminism is looking to become what one is, and doing what one wants to do as an individual, and not as a woman' -Jane O'REILLY, May 1979.

We must first put forward the principle that the abolition of patriarchy and the establishment of a relationship with the environment that is finally balanced are not only fundamentally linked, but also can only occur in a post-revolutionary and self-managing society.

The first relationship between ecology and the liberation of women is the reclamation by women of population growth, defining the reappropriation of the body (all liberation is liberation of the *body* and of *time*). This liberation has already begun in highly industrialized countries, which must, for reasons of productivity, grant women contraception. (This same contraception was denied them during the beginning stages of Capital for the opposite reasons. Today the same profit-based system no longer needs abundant manpower but seeks, on the contrary, to limit it, forcing it to deal with the issue of unemployment.)

The second reason that Daddy's Capital insists on a high birth-rate is the need for soldiers; however, now that the proliferation of nuclear arms compels those in power to reject armed conflict amongst themselves, replacing it with war amongst interposed peoples (in the Third World), this second motive no longer plays a part. The poverty-stricken peoples of the Third World have been able to protest against proposed measures to limit population growth because of the crucial need felt by families to keep some children alive to take care of their aging parents. These survivors of infant mortality are only the tip of the iceberg while the huge number of births remains the crux of the matter. This misogynistic disgrace which enslaves women will cease only with a rise in the standard of living.

The progress in the stature of Western women begins with a veritable liberation and is balanced against social injustice, the exploitation of poor countries, the exportation of deadly armaments and nuclear industries, and devastation of the environment as ends to productivity.

What keeps Capital, the last stage of Patriarchy, from achieving an ecological society when the analyses of the Club of Rome¹ have proven to what point it is aware, right to the top, of this dangerous peril?

The old revolutionary guard clearly showed that the number one interest of capitalist exploitation used to be the private possession of the sources of collectively consumed production. Today, this motivation is reinforced by the need to conserve a *unique* form of energy in order to insure the centralization of power. This is why nuclear power, a completely insane waste of time and a threat of agony for all living kind, has been preserved against all logic, ever since oil, which flows in poor countries and not in those "on the right side of the tracks," ceased to be the number one factor in profit.

Many different forms of energy could be used instead of this one: hard methods such as *geo-thermal*: the layer of water underneath the Central Massif could provide for half of all domestic heating in France, for example; soft methods like *solar*, which in France could only be a secondary source of energy, even if it was a French company that made it the main source of energy in Mexico. The use of *tidal* power, which at one time demanded an enormous complex (like at *la Rance*) could today be carried out by the completely attainable means of industrial miniaturization. In Grenoble, official studies were undertaken on the energy to be gleaned from *natural gas*, another interesting secondary source of energy. Finally, France Electric (Energie de France) itself had to admit that the *hydrographic* energy available was far from being used throughout the entire country. All the studies necessary are there to prove that a *unique* source of production is far from necessary, and thus that nuclear could be replaced by an array of techniques, even if ecologists insist upon the "soft," while industry insists upon the "hard." Whether soft or not, the most important is that this multiplicity could thwart the worst danger that humanity has ever known: atomic extinction.

Yet the concentration of energy within a small number of hands is the absolute guarantee of a centralization which remains necessary to the pyramidal organization of a profit-based society born of the

foundations of patriarchy. *Capital is but the last stage of patriarchy, just like profit is but the last mask of power.*

The theses of *Eco-Feminism: Revolution or Mutation?* established that:

1. The immediate cause of present-day woes and future threats is the patriarchal system, founded upon the appropriation of procreation and fertility, the mental and cultural structures of which have persisted across all successive social and economic domains.
2. The two principal factors in the rapid expansion of patriarchy, *exhaustion of resources* and *global population growth*, are the distant yet *direct* causes of the present-day ecological catastrophe.
3. The battle of the sexes merely reflects man's battle against himself, which in the past, and still today, translates to the battle of the classes.
4. The failure of socialist revolutions comes from their economic failure and refusal to consider anything other than the "battle of the classes" without examining the foundations of hierarchy and human exploitation: *sexism*.
5. Capital, now in the imperialist stage, will only disappear with an ecological solution of production (and of consumption) which will constitute the only possible elimination of the outdated structures of *dominance, aggressiveness, competitiveness, and absolutism* in order to replace them with those of *cooperation and equality between individuals* (thus between sexes), *and of the species with the environment*.

Due to the liberation of procreation, population growth controlled by women will solve the first part of the problem. The number of inhabitants on the planet will be reduced completely without prejudice as to humanity's end. Neo-Malthusianism is only condemnable when it serves as an instrument to conserve the well-being of a privileged minority at the expense of an exploited majority, which yesterday's socialism was correct in denouncing and whose mistake was in only considering this aspect of the question.

The second part of the problem, the question of consumption-production and its relationship to the environment's devastation to the point of exhaustion of its resources obviously concerns men as well as women. It would be impossible to believe that this "first sex," the former manager of this world placed in peril of death by him must himself find the solution and apply it. On the contrary, here too women play a primary role. As human beings, they are just as threatened as men by the nuclear dangers they have instituted; as procreators, women are all the more concerned with the outcome of future generations, while this concerns only the most highly aware amongst men.

Not merely an anecdote but a significant fact of the great antinuclear battle is that of Whyll Nuclear Facility (1975), whose first administration was defeated by women and their children *in a violent affront*. A few months earlier, the Fessenheim facility was attacked, which delayed the nuclear program by a year and for which responsibility was claimed by a commando reminded by women that this "industry of death originated in a patriarchal society."

But if Eco-feminism points out the only avenue by which to escape death, it is even more difficult to estimate the path future generations will follow. In general, "Utopias," even in the best sense of the word, resemble too closely the god of Basilides, definable in that Greek's words only by all that which he is not. Let us, however, try to examine what an ecological, egalitarian, peaceful and self-managing society might look like.

1. The sources of production are no longer private.

Who will manage them? If it's the "delegates of the people," we already know how that sort of enterprise turns out. They would have to be saints, and people are not saints. Even if the first generation were made up of them the second generation couldn't be. "To represent the people is to substitute oneself for the people," a truth of which old anarchists, even Sun Yat-Sen, were aware.

On the other hand, a multiplicity of non-hierarchilized individuals is incompetent for this management and tends to give in to specialists who constitute a new power. It is upon this fact that all forms of government have always relied in order to reign. As Serge Milgram demonstrated, "submission to authority" corresponds to the most ancient need of human survival and is the primary obstacle to *direct democracy*.

This is where a principal that is today just as important as automation comes into play: that of *atomization* (the true symbol of an *atomic* society!) Work is in a state of shambles; daily life is segmented; oppression (of class or of sex) possesses a multitude of disseminated micro-centers, in the form of firms, neighborhoods, stores, universities, high schools, the street, the home. The proletariat no longer resembles that of the past, including that of the immediate past (War of Liberation); it has been eradicated, dispersed and will be even moreso with the development of computer technology. It is a hoax to still claim that a question is only possible at the elevated and rarified level organizing "mass"-consumption. *Miniaturization* is technically possible at the level of industry (measures of production and means of exploitation) as well as at the level of administrative management. It will be the response to the enormous sophisticated complexes directed by a small number of specialists who are themselves in the service of an even smaller and all-powerful number of owners of production. Generalized self-management can only be achieved by small groups (professionals, ethnic groups, groups organized in committees) overseeing a small grouping of means of production (new units of production) belonging to a *reduced* and *miniaturized* industry. It is not a question of a miniscule society but of an adaptation to current needs and ecology. The works of Murray Boochkin and Michel Bosquet demonstrate that it's possible.

The principal of the microcosm is rejected and scoffed at by today's imperialist system and by the patriarchy, whereas they use them constantly when it comes to *atomizing* our lives, our activities, our leisure, our oppression and our culture.

The problem that this choice will obviously pose will be the type of relationship between the different self-managing committees and the code they use to do business. This problem will only be completely solved in a second stage, when it will be possible to supplant the monetary system of exchange.

2. From work to service. Specializations.

The notion of work (and thus of a wage-earning class) can only disappear in favor of *service* with an inevitable and immense range of specialists. Only a very small number of people will be able to correspond to the indispensable specializations, whereas today any job comprises a (more and more complex) specialization.

The bare necessities that are food, habitat, clothing and play (shows, art, bodily exercise without competition, etc.) could easily be satisfied by the individual possessing the leisure time needed to learn production techniques or training for it. In a first stage, the exchange of information and teaching of specialties could be actualized with little cost in creative and instructional centers made for this purpose.

One would thus see the mason, the clothes maker, the farmer, etc., exchange the teaching of their work with that of the electrician, the mechanic, the radio-operator, etc.

In this way, instead of passing through an entire chain of specialists to satisfy ones most basic needs, it would be possible for one to reduce ones suppliers to the strict minimum after having learned the techniques that permit one to replace others, who are themselves remunerated by their own work. This goes without counting the advantages of maximally satisfying ones desires, since individuals alone know exactly what they want. Today's system constricts them to a choice between a multitude of non-desired objects. Publicity is there to create false needs, which mask our real desires. The suppression of this deceptive and unproductive sector could unleash an enormous sum of *work* (in the sense of productive or creative activity) and of *leisure*ⁱⁱⁱ.

3. Relationship between Consumption and Production.

This is the fundamental structure of all human community. The relationship that exists now consists of working, in other words, selling ones time and ones active force against a salary which permits consumption, thus the purchasing of the fruit of *the work of others*. Exploited masses can produce or transport an object of consumption without ever profiting from it. Tamouls grow fruit that they do not eat, Latinos harvest coffee that others consume, production line-workers fashion cars, stereos, etc., that they could never themselves afford. This relationship must be abolished.

The exchange of specialized knowledge could, in a stage further along, replace the monetary system without going back to the awkward bartering of developing societies. This consists, of course, of a disruption that neither capitalist society *nor the regime of Patriarchy* could bear. In addition to all the objects one can possess,

one of the consumable goods in this system remains that of *Woman*. "Work and you will have a wife; succeed and you will have a mistress" is a popular proverb of a very illuminating cynicism. All mental structures result from this perverted, misleading and prostitutional relationship of consumption to production (consuming in order to reproduce ones manpower) and of production to consumption (producing by means of ones work in order to spend ones salary) have rested for millennia upon this foundation. This is to say that a *mutation* (the real and never-achieved goal of precedent revolutions) is necessary to get there. As I explained in 1980 in Canada, only Eco-feminism will put an end to Patriarchy and save human society from the devastation wrought on the environment, the nuclear threat and the profit-based system which is at the origin of all war and exploitation on this planet.

For more than one hundred years, Marxism has envisioned the disappearance of the "means of exchange," the basis of the mercantile economy (Marx in 1875, Engels in 1894). But no Marxist regime has been able to achieve it because *it is impossible, within patriarchy, to suppress a market economy. And it is impossible, in a market system, to not devastate the planet. It is up to women, now, to reclaim the voice of humanity.*

ⁱ Translator's note: "The Club of Rome, founded in 1968 in Rome, is a group of scientists, economists, businessmen, international high civil servants, Heads of State and former Heads of State from the 5 continents, who are convinced that the future of humankind is not determined once and for all and that each human being can contribute to the improvement of our societies." Quoted from the Club of Rome's home page at [HTTP://www.clubofrome.org/](http://www.clubofrome.org/)

ⁱⁱ *Icare*, Calmann Lévy Editions, Paris.

ⁱⁱⁱ Other reductions or suppressions of useless production would shore up the necessary time to learn the skills in question.