

Women and Ecology: The fascist potential of some feminist theories

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This article, from the late seventies, gives a glimpse into the discussions and debates occurring within the second-wave feminist movement and in particular into the understanding of eco-feminism. Eco-feminism was a term coined in 1974 by Francoise d'Eaubonne converging feminist and ecological thinking together with the believe that the social mentality that leads to the domination and oppression of women is directly connected to the social mentality that leads to the abuse of the natural environment. Therefore overcoming the oppression of women and the oppression of the environment wee seen as fundamentally linked to one another. This article is a direct response to what was a newly emerging environmental theory.

If we want to try to understand the connection between the fight for women's liberation and the fight against the permanent destruction of the ecological balance, then this should be done – we believe – on two levels. In the first place, recent radical feminist literature offers possible theoretical analyses of this relationship whose usefulness must be examined. In the second place, on the practical level, women have developed specific methods of fighting which arose from their concrete needs and have nothing to do with the above-mentioned theoretical approaches...

To begin with, I shall describe the theses of Francoise d'Eaubonne which are summarized in her book *The Time of Eco-Feminism*. D'Eaubonne sees a new feminist humanism as a long-range objective of the fight "which would mean the inevitable end of the male-dominated society and can be built up only on the solution of the ecological question".¹ For her, the most urgent objective is the reorganization of the planet, which is faced with extinction. This global objective is her answer to the segmentation of the feminist front. In the foreground of her thesis, however, is the assumption that women are the only sex "that is able to accept, to refuse, to delay or to accelerate the reproduction of our species", – in other words: they are the only sex that at present represent both death warrant and salvation of mankind.

For d'Eaubonne, eco-feminism is the only possibility of securing the future of our species. In her argumentation, d'Eaubonne mentions overpopulation and the destruction of natural resources as deadly threats. She thinks that these two factors are caused by the male system, as they are the logical result of one of two parallel discoveries that rendered power to the men fifty centuries ago: their faculty to fertilise not only the earth but also women, and their participation in the act of procreation. D'Eaubonne does not, however, explain the causal relationship between these discoveries and patriarchy on the one hand, as well as over-exploitation in the shape of overpopulation or the destruction of the environment on the other hand.

¹ Francoise d'Eaubonne, *Feminsmus oder Tod*, (Munich, 1977).

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I am not going to mention the facts that d'Eaubonne gives in order to prove the threat from the above-mentioned two phenomena as they do not correspond to the present state of research, and thus are no longer applicable because the ecological crisis has been aggravated since the publication of the book. There is, however, one point which seems to explain why d'Eaubonne declares overpopulation as an extra target of attack. She gives the statistics of what an American citizen consumes during his lifetime, and concludes that the birth of one American baby is twenty-five times graver for ecology than the birth of a Hindu baby. The birth of an American baby costs the lives of six-eight babies from the third world. In other words: the problem of over-population is not one of the third world as is maintained over and over again with the intention of disguising the real facts. This aspect has to be included in the fight for the control of reproduction. In summing up d'Eaubonne's theory, we should note the following essential points:

1. The oppression of women is the result of a male dominated society. Therefore the fight for socialism cannot affect the liberation of women.
2. In a profit system, the ecological problem is connected with capitalism, but its existence in socialist countries proves that it is not identical with capitalism.
3. Phallocracy is the basis for the destruction of nature – in a capitalist society, it devotes itself to profit, in a socialist system to progress.
4. "The planet has to be taken from the present-day men in order to place it in the hands of the mankind of tomorrow. This is the only alternative, because if the male-dominated society continues to exist, there won't be any mankind tomorrow".²

The dangerous logic of this theory has perhaps been made clear so far. Nevertheless, I shall describe another attempt at explanation, namely Gabrielle Kuby's *The End of Patriarchal Supremacy*.³

Kuby regards the ecological crisis as the material basis of the women's movement. For her the destruction of nature represents the last stage of patriarchal domination:

Men have got the world into such a state that the living conditions of all people are severely jeopardized. That's new; up to now, 'only' the majority of minorities, groups and nations has been oppressed and exterminated. Now life as such is endangered whether in the shape of human beings, animals, plants, soil, water or air. A new stage of violence has been reached. Marx realized that the metabolism between man and nature under capitalistic conditions takes place in the form of exploitation of man and nature. But as the destruction of our planet had not presented itself as a problem at that time, his analysis centres on the physical and psychic destruction of man. ... To be radical means to tackle a matter at its root. The root of man, however, is man himself. Through the destruction of nature we realize man has roots too. They are in

² Ibid 1

³ Gabrielle Kuby, "The End of Patriarchal Supremacy", *Frauenoffensive*, No.2, (April, 1975).

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*the soil. To have this knowledge in the centre of man's thinking and acting means to be radical.*⁴

Kuby looks upon the capitalist form of metabolism with nature as the highest form of destruction of nature, and regards capitalism as the highest form of patriarchal tyranny. In her view, however, the establishment of a socialistic society is only a necessary precondition of restoring the balance of nature. In the last analysis she demands the matriarchal principle of control. Kuby sees the mother-child relationship as the origin of the patriarchal destruction of nature. While daughters experience an identity with their mothers, sons do not have such an experience. This original experience of man leads to the separation of the conscious and the unconscious which subsequently causes the one-sided development of the intellect, "the detachment from the concrete, a precondition of thinking as such". Kuby does not take into account the disadvantages which the daughter's original identification with the mother can entail. The identification with the mother can severely impede the daughter in finding her own identity.

Referring to this, Moeller Gambaroff expressed the view that women's fear of emancipating themselves, of leaving the mother-child relationship, may lead to repressions and to the projection of man as enemy. Therefore she holds that the discussion of the mother-problem is indispensable for the feminist movement: "The individual mastering of the matriarchy precedes the collective mastering of the patriarchy".⁵ Kuby on, the other hand, values the identification with the mother as a wholly positive affair.

The identification with the mother and the functioning of the female body does not allow a detachment from the unconscious, from nature. The development of this material basis, the ecological crisis, makes it necessary for women to recover their identity by studying the history of matriarchy and putting it in to use for the process of exchange with nature. In this process balance must be achieved in order to guarantee permanence.

As practical consequences for the feminist movement, Kuby suggests CR-groups in the main and establishment of a counterculture as an area free from control. She demands wages for housework, as the production of the next generation should be recognised as a socially necessary and productive occupation. "The material independence from men, and the rejection of marriage, are the preconditions for educating our children towards matriarchal consciousness".

Feminism and Fascism

...In the following, I shall try to formulate some provisional criticisms of these theories. I shall use as a basis an analyses from the magazine *Mummies peaches – Women and Literature*, titled "Fascist Analogies in Feminist Publications".⁶

⁴ Ibid 2

⁵ Marina Moeller-Gambaroff, "Emanzipation macht Angst", *Kursbuch*, 47 (March, 1977).

⁶ Heide Heinz, "Faschistische Tendenzen in feministischen Publikationen" *mamas prirsiche – fraen und literature*, No.6 (1977).

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The two theories presented are based on the assumption that an original matriarchy has been superseded by a patriarchy that must now be superseded itself, because of its destroyed ecological basis, by a society of – or at least controlled by – women. While d’Eaubonne regards women as that sex which has to decide on the future, Kuby talks about the nature of women as one that has close original links with nature. Thus both proceed from a ‘natural’ privilege of women in societies-to-come. The role of man in these societies becomes clear, for instance, in the last quote from Kuby in the final analysis her demands for isolation reduce men to their function of procreation. This pattern of thinking has a striking resemblance to the following quotation from a completely different source:

It must not be overlooked that political opponents may also come from families of healthy stock from whom (the unreliable parents) we wish to have a large number of children for reason of race and inheritance, and that we must therefore make sure of their children at least. We shall then bring up the children according to our ideals and employ them in the causes of National Socialism on strength of their good hereditary factors...

– “Decree of the Party Chancellery”

D’Eaubonne, too, allows men only a very questionable existence when she demands the removal of the incest taboo between mother and son in order to subvert the father’s dictatorship over both of them. Referring to this, Heinz says:

The mother-son incest does in fact bring out the exclusion of the father, but that is not the only effect. In addition to this, it also causes the son’s manhood to be engulfed by his mother, that is to say – in a highly symptomatic way – in the last resort highly psychotic or homosexual – he becomes himself almost a woman.

On the other hand, I find that the recurrent claims of women’s originality especially dangerous. They can be found in Kuby, who talks about the characteristic female features that ascribe to women the “objective historical mission of introducing female rule”. Compare the following quotation from the National Socialist era: “The German man had become a stranger to himself. He had exchanged an apparent external liberty for an almost complete violation of his inner self”. Or, “He was the plaything of foreign nations and the slave of a bourgeois-proletarian, to be precise, of a Jewish-dominated world. The origin of this slavery? The impure races are after all diabolic by nature!”

Without wanting to go into details in the matter of analogous ways of thinking in feminist and fascist ideology, I’d like to sum up a few points for further criticism:

1. The general historical theory of the superiority of original natural state, the attack of evil forces on it, (compare the supposed humiliation of the German people by the Western Allies after World War One), the subsequent rule of Evil (the Jew had been set up as the personification of evil itself by National Socialism), the salvation by latent forces of the original state which is still effective and finally the setting up of the ideal and eternal state – this model can be found both in National Socialist and feminist literature as described above.

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2. A further characteristic is the biological ideology of naturalness which can be found in fascist writings as well as feminist theoretical texts.
3. Furthermore, one can establish in texts from both these movements a special predilection for 'direct perception', that is, intuition as the means of understanding and in contrast to this a distrust of knowledge which has intellectual and scientific basis.

On the basis of this criticism we should try to develop a sound explanation of the relationship of our fight for liberation and the fight against the destruction of the essential foundations of our lives. At present, because of our historically developed function of reproduction we, as women, can experience more concretely how much our capacity to reproduce is in fact becoming more and more limited through various results of the ecological crisis. In order to disprove the thesis of the original female nature as well as to gain a starting point for our commitment, it will be necessary for us to develop a more concrete picture of our needs.

- This article was first published in April 1978 in "The Bread is Rising" a compilation of papers presented to the WSCF meeting of European women at the 1977 'Ecumene' conference in, Italy. The publication was produced by SCM Britain on behalf of the European region's Women's Project. They had three main areas of study: Women and socialism; Woman and Theology; and Woman and the Church. Anna Fraling, the author, was from the Federal Republic of Germany