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Women and the crisis of the capitalist system – Marijke Colle

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Extract from the communist manifesto (1847)

Chapter II

Abolition [Aufhebung] of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists.

On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution.

The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.

Do you charge us with wanting to stop the exploitation of children by their parents? To this crime we plead guilty.

But, you say, we destroy the most hallowed of relations, when we replace home education by social. And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by the social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools, &c.? The Communists have not invented the intervention of society in education; they do but seek to alter the character of that intervention, and to rescue education from the influence of the ruling class.

The bourgeois clap-trap about the family and education, about the hallowed co-relation of parents and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of Modern Industry, all the family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour.

But you Communists would introduce community of women, screams the bourgeoisie in chorus.

The bourgeois sees his wife a mere instrument of production. He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common, and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women.

He has not even a suspicion that the real point aimed at is to do away with the status of women as mere instruments of production.

For the rest, nothing is more ridiculous than the virtuous indignation of our bourgeois at the community of women which, they pretend, is to be openly and officially established by the Communists. The Communists have no need to introduce community of women; it has existed almost from time immemorial. Our bourgeois, not content with having wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal, not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other's wives. Bourgeois marriage is, in reality, a system of wives in common and thus, at the most, what the Communists might possibly be reproached with is that they desire to introduce, in substitution for a hypocritically concealed, an openly legalised community of women.

For the rest, it is self-evident that the abolition of the present system of production must bring with it the abolition of the community of women springing from that system, i.e., of prostitution both public and private.

The Employment of Women and Children

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In so far as machinery dispenses with muscular power, it becomes a means of employing labourers of slight muscular strength, and those whose bodily development is incomplete, but whose limbs are all the more supple. The labour of women and children was, therefore, the first thing sought for by capitalists who used machinery. That mighty substitute for labour and labourers was forthwith changed into a means for increasing the number of wage-labourers by enrolling, under the direct sway of capital, every member of the workman's family, without distinction of age or sex. Compulsory work for the capitalist usurped the place, not only of the children's play, but also of free labour at home within moderate limits for the support of the family. [38]

38. Dr. Edward Smith, during the cotton crisis caused by the American Civil War, was sent by the English Government to Lancashire, Cheshire, and other places, to report on the sanitary condition of the cotton operatives. He reported, that from a hygienic point of view, and apart from the banishment of the operatives from the factory atmosphere, the crisis had several advantages. The women now had sufficient leisure to give their infants the breast, instead of poisoning them with "Godfrey's cordial." They had time to learn to cook. Unfortunately the acquisition of this art occurred at a time when they had nothing to cook. But from this we see how capital, for the purposes of its self-expansion, has usurped the labour necessary in the home of the family. This crisis was also utilised to teach sewing to the daughters of the workmen in sewing schools. An American revolution and a universal crisis, in order that the working girls, who spin for the whole world, might learn to sew!

The value of labour-power was determined, not only by the labour-time necessary to maintain the individual adult labourer, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family on to the labour-market, spreads the value of the man's labour-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates his labour-power. To purchase the labour-power of a family of four workers may, perhaps, cost more than it formerly did to purchase the labour-power of the head of the family, but, in return, four days' labour takes the place of one, and their price falls in proportion to the excess of the surplus-labour of four over the surplus-labour of one. In order that the family may live, four people must now, not only labour, but expend surplus-labour for the capitalist. Thus we see, that machinery, while augmenting the human material that forms the principal object of capital's exploiting power, [39] at the same time raises the degree of exploitation.

39. "The numerical increase of labourers has been great, through the growing substitution of female for male, and above all, of childish for adult labour. Three girls of 13, at wages of from 6 shillings to 8 shillings a week, have replaced the one man of mature age, of wages varying from 18 shillings to 45 shillings." (Th. de Quincey: "The Logic of Political Econ.," London, 1844. Note to p. 147.) Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers confiscated by capital, must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence, the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money. The cost of keeping the family increases, and balances the greater income. In addition to this, economy and judgment in the consumption and preparation of the means of subsistence becomes impossible. Abundant material relating to these facts, which are concealed by official Political Economy, is to be found in the Reports of the Inspectors of Factories, of the Children's Employment Commission, and more especially in the Reports on Public Health.

Machinery also revolutionises out and out the contract between the labourer and the capitalist, which

formally fixes their mutual relations. Taking the exchange of commodities as our basis, our first assumption was that capitalist and labourer met as free persons, as independent owners of commodities; the one possessing money and means of production, the other labour-power. But now the capitalist buys children and young persons under age. Previously, the workman sold his own labour-power, which he disposed of nominally as a free agent. Now he sells wife and child. He has become a slave-dealer. [40] The demand for children's labour often resembles in form the inquiries for negro slaves, such as were formerly to be read among the advertisements in American journals.

40. In striking contrast with the great fact, that the shortening of the hours of labour of women and children in English factories was exacted from capital by the male operatives, we find in the latest reports of the Children's Employment Commission traits of the operative parents in relation to the traffic in children, that are truly revolting and thoroughly like slave-dealing. But the Pharisee of a capitalist, as may be seen from the same reports, denounces this brutality which he himself creates, perpetuates, and exploits, and which he moreover baptises "freedom of labour." "Infant labour has been called into aid ... even to work for their own daily bread. Without strength to endure such disproportionate toil, without instruction to guide their future life, they have been thrown into a situation physically and morally polluted. The Jewish historian has remarked upon the overthrow of Jerusalem by Titus that it was no wonder it should have been destroyed, with such a signal destruction, when an inhuman mother sacrificed her own offspring to satisfy the cravings of absolute hunger." ("Public Economy Concentrated." Carlisle, 1833, p. 66.)

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Women's oppression in globalization

Women /

Wednesday, 17 March 2004 / Stephanie Treillet

The existence of women's oppression pre-dates not only globalization, but also capitalism itself. Moreover, due to its specific characteristics, the consequences that globalization exerts on it are not a foregone or one-sided conclusion. Globalization implies an unequal and different extension of capitalist production relations, in the north and the south alike. Today, women are at the heart of this process. To grasp its complexity, we must review the specific nature of gender oppression, and the particular means by which it interplays with the capitalist mode of production.

Gender oppression cuts through all other forms of domination and exploitation in human societies. In particular, it extends beyond class conflicts, but it also cuts through all collective social realities - ethnic, national, religious, local. Moreover, it is closely tied up with the private sphere, individual and daily life, making awareness of its existence and the emergence of a collective emancipatory project particularly difficult. Finally, it is a socially constructed oppression, producing an ideological representation of differences often perceived as natural, and confined to the field of biology or psychology.

Furthermore, although gender oppression did not emerge with private ownership of the means of production or capitalism, [1] it has linked up dynamically with the different stages of the latter. Capitalism implies a growing separation of producers from the means of production, and a separation between the spheres of production of goods and reproduction of the labour force. This gave rise to what is known today as "housework" in its current form: tasks falling primarily and at times exclusively on women's shoulders.

So, neoliberal globalization must be examined as a particular stage in capitalism as it relates to gender-based oppression. By bringing about a forced march of capitalist production relations and the destabilization of former hierarchies, especially in the dominated countries, at a speed never before encountered, the capitalist mode of production never stops engendering itself.

This is truer still if we take into account the sexual and social division of labour on which gender oppression is based. The capitalist means of production benefits from free reproduction of the labour force to increase the rate of surplus value. But at the same time, it has a vital need to have a reserve army of labour at its disposal, so it can extend wage work massively at any time, "forming a flexible labour market, on the international level, in which women occupy a strategic opposition in terms of their position both through their insertion both in wage labour and the informal sector is on the agenda" (Hirata and Le Doaré, 1998).

The question of the consequences of globalization on the oppression of women is at the heart of this contradiction. So, we can make the following observations:

- because there is a sexual and social division of labour, the consequences of neoliberal globalization on men and women are not the same;
- simultaneously, neoliberal globalization cannot take the blame for all cases of heightened oppression

of women in the contemporary world. Some of these have much more complex and often far older causes.

- Finally, due to its very nature, neoliberal globalization causes upheavals and destabilises prior social relationships and the traditional forms of domination.

We must understand that these trends are aspects of the same contradictory and dialectical process. Liberalization and structural adjustment: increased inequalities

Liberal globalization - and the economic policies implementing it - are contributing to stepping up the super-exploitation and oppression of women, in most cases. Throughout the world, we are observing the feminization of poverty. In the North, women make up the majority of poor workers, underemployed and unable to survive on their wages. This situation, which has existed for a long time in the English-speaking countries, appeared several years ago in France with the extension of part-time work, most of which is done by women. Women also make up the bulk of unemployed workers, whatever their age and skill level.

They are also the first group affected by structural adjustment strategies and economic liberalization, in many ways. They are affected since they bear the primary burden for reproducing the labour force. Measures partially socializing these tasks are under attack: elimination of day care centres in the Eastern bloc, privatization of schools and health care systems in the South, decline in quality and increased costs for all heretofore public systems, such as access to tap water, electricity, public transport, elimination of subsidies for basic needs. Women are the first to pay for these measures entailing harsher living conditions and a significant increase in the free labour they must perform. They also suffer the consequences of their subordinate position within the family: when education and medical care have to be paid for in the Third World, girls are taken out of school first, or first deprived of vaccinations.

Women are also affected due to their specific place in the labour market: layoffs in the public sector, education, health, and the civil service, remove a lot of the jobs they held beforehand.

Finally, they are disadvantaged due to the systematic discrimination they encounter in terms of farm production: access to land, credit and training. The decline in subsistence agriculture with respect to export crops is a catastrophe for women. They face threats in terms of food security, access to land (men leave women the least fertile land), a consequent increase in their workload both on the land to which they have usufruct rights and sometimes on their husband's land, in particular in Sub-Saharan Africa. More generally, in all the rural regions of the Third World, their subordinate position in the social division of agricultural labour means that capitalist modernization of agriculture has worsened their situation, whether in terms of access to land or jobs, income, workload and control over the latter (Agarwal 1985).

Finally, the extension on the world scale of commodity relations reinforces the system of prostitution and other forms of human trafficking (new forms of slavery) of which women are, of course, the foremost victims.

Contradictory changes

The contradictory nature of the relations between globalization and the oppression of women seem even clearer in Third World economies. Indeed, beyond the diversity of societies and situations, we can observe that the upheavals due to globalization have occurred following the development strategies

that, from the 1950s to the 1970s, were completely blind to women's place, in particular in farming. Training programmes and land reform only targeted "heads of households". These changes also played a part in destabilizing social structures that were far from the "original" state of these societies. They had undergone in-depth changes due to colonization and were reconfigured by capitalism. Nevertheless, they called upon tradition to justify certain forms of persistent subjection of women in the family, the community and so on.

Almost everywhere, we have observed an increase in the rate of women's labour force participation over the last thirty years, even in Third World regions such as North Africa where it was traditionally low (Talahite 1998). This growth in labour force participation, in wage work and the informal sector alike, generally follows direct foreign investment flows oriented towards export industries (Treillet 1999). Many studies, in particular the study carried out by the Gedisst [2] on the "paradoxes of globalization" did note an increase in paid skilled (industrial) employment opportunities for women in certain Asian or Latin American countries (Hirata and Le Doaré 1998). However, "this new reality is contradictory": even in jobs relating to new technologies (computer systems, electronics) and which are not limited to assembly work, "women are limited to the worst maintenance service work". Trade liberalization in different countries, in particular in Latin America, led to the bankruptcy of many industries protected beforehand by customs barriers and mostly employing men, while labour-intensive export industries had first hired women. The workers in these industries are subjected to all the worst aspects of super-exploitation: unhealthy and often hazardous working conditions, not counting sexist violence, harassment, and often interference with their private lives.

We can also observe the contradictory effects of the extension of individual property rights to farmland; in Africa, and in Mexico with the reform of the Ejido [3] (Katz 1999). In effect, this development, of which we have seen the overall negative consequences described above, sometimes impinges on certain rights that had been granted to women by custom, but always subordinate to the whims of men or male community-based authorities. We find the same contradictory aspect in situations of economic and social crisis. A study of the consequences of the Asian crisis in 1997-98 in the Philippines (Lim 2000) shows that this brought about a general impoverishment of the population, a greater increase in the hours of paid and unpaid employment among women than among men and a growth in the number of women working in the informal sector. But it also meant unemployment growing more rapidly among men than among women, due to the very segregation of the labour market in which women are over represented in the informal sector and in service and commercial jobs, less affected by the crisis.

Sometimes, on the contrary, women's jobs are the first to experience the consequences of reversal of growth. The garment industry in the Philippines was hard-hit by the WTO's elimination of import quotas. In many cases, the development of export industries, in particular in electronics, led to the expulsion of women: production units became more capital and technology intensive, and began to prefer hiring men.

Finally, at times transnational capital can benefit from tradition. This is what we have observed in recent years with the growth of subcontracting which develops work in the home, supposedly allowing women to simultaneously take charge of "their own" household tasks and child-rearing in places where there are no day care centres and sometimes not any schools, and in societies where women were traditionally confined to the home, as in South Asia. This allows for a reconciliation of the capitalist order and the patriarchal order, with the latter given the responsibility of ensuring industrial discipline on behalf of the former.

Potentialities for struggle

Despite all of this, the elements of instability brought about by globalization can contribute to a change in the status of women in the society, albeit to a limited extent. Many examples have shown that this is the case in Latin America when women are the only family members who can keep a paid job. In India, the expansion of footwear industries in a town in Tamil Nadu since the 1980s, drawing mostly upon young female workers, has led to an upheaval in terms of traditions: women working alongside men and a social mixing, challenging the caste system, greater freedom of movement in the public space for young women who have thereby succeeded in delaying their marriage age, or no longer consider that they must necessarily marry (Venou 1999).

But above all, the massive entry of women into the wage labour force, even if it is flexible and casualised, and more generally in paid economic activity outside the domestic space, opens up to them, in these very difficult economic conditions, the possibility to begin organising, to have their rights as women workers recognised. So, while even multinational firms are counting on the extension of subcontracting and work in the home to intensify the super-exploitation of women workers, in India, since the beginning of the 1970s, the Self-employed women's association (SEWA) has been striving to organise them and to win recognition of their employee status (Verschuur 2000). In Mexican maquiladoras, working women are taking part in the struggle for independent trade unionism (Valadez 1998). So there are two traps to be avoided while understanding the development of women's oppression under globalization: on the one hand, seeing a kind of linear, unconditional progress for women. This is the outlook of the World Bank that is making use of a gender perspective from a neo-liberal outlook (globalization provides greater opportunities to individuals) - while continuing to count on women's free labour to cushion the most brutal impacts of structural adjustment. It is just as important to avoid, on the other hand, a nostalgic view of traditional societies in the name of the struggle against imperialism and the commodification of the world, while glossing over their fundamentally oppressive aspects for women. To get out of this dilemma, we must see women's struggles as an integral part of all facets of struggle against neo-liberal globalization.

This article first appeared in *Critique Communiste*, the theoretical journal of the LCR in France.

[1] See on this subject "Engels et l'émancipation des femmes", analysis by Josette Trat (1997) of Engels' work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and the debates on this subject.

[2] See on this subject "Engels et l'émancipation des femmes", analysis by Josette Trat (1997) of Engels' work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* and the debates on this subject.

[3] Communal use of land, dating back to the revolution and challenged by the reform of article 27 of the Constitution, which in the early 1990s put these lands on the market.

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A summary of an “ecofeminist worldview”

Ecology and Feminism /

Thursday, 28 June 2012 / Marijke Colle /

Marijke Colle is an Executive CO-Director the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam. She studied Biology at the Ghent State University and was always interested in ecology and the protection of the environment. As a student, she was active in radical left movements, in solidarity with the May 68 Revolt and in the campaigns against the Vietnam War. She became a founding member of the RAL/LRT, Belgian Section of the Fourth International in 1970. The seventies were also the start of the women’s movement in Belgium and she was centrally involved in the struggle for free abortion and contraception on demand and later on, also in the struggles of trade-union women against the crisis. She participated in writing the Resolution on Women’s Liberation for the XIth World Congress of the Fourth International in 1979. In 2008, she became involved in the founding process of the NPA in France and was elected in the national leadership of the NPA in January 2009.

Ecofeminism developed in the 1980’s in the context of a growing green movement and of large anti-war and anti-nuclear missiles mobilisations. The ‘worldview’ of ecofeminists resonates today with the fights of indigenous people and of farmers organisations such as La Via Campesina.

Here are some key elements of their analysis and views.

Western society values male and scientific knowledge above everything else , it devalues the natural reproductive capacities of women and of nature. Experts and owners of capital have developed new biotechnologies (GMOs, genetically modified organisms, and IVF, in vitro fertilisation) to keep their grip and control over women and over nature.

Fertile earth and the fertility of women are transformed through male domination and the technological creativity of the male takes a central position in society. Earth and women are the passive terrain for the intervention by male experts, medical doctors, agronomists, agribusiness men. [1]

Geneticists consider traditional selection as backward and chaotic – GMO varieties represent progress, order and money. Farmers are forced to use the seeds, the fertilizers and the pesticides sold as a package by multinational agribusiness companies. The farmers lose their traditional ownership of seeds and varieties and must pay patent rights for selected hybrid and GMO plants and seeds.

Women have a duty to produce healthy children and are the objects of an expanding health industry with genetic screening of (pre- implantation) embryos, scans and echo-graphies, and a growing number of caesareans. Women lose the possibility and the capacity to decide for themselves.

Colonialism despised the primitive and the backward cultures of indigenous, non-white and local traditional communities who were considered more to be part of the local fauna than of the human race. [2]

The genocides performed in colonial times were disguised as the introduction of progress for primitive societies and as the conquest of ‘empty’ land. The common property and the common use of the land

were considered an obstacle to the progress of civilisation. The young Charles Darwin noted in his diary that the complete equality amongst the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego would remain an obstacle for any progress of their civilisation until a leader would emerge who would have the strength to become the owner of all property. [3]

Vandana Shiva wrote in 1992 : ‘ ...improved’ seeds and foetuses are in reality imprisoned seeds and foetuses. The right to self determination of farmers and of women is degraded to backwardness and ignorance. The violent expropriation of the autonomous producers is a process to steal what belongs to nature and to women, in the name of progress. Violence and theft were not only the basis for the creation of wealth in our colonial past, they continue with neo-colonialism today which threatens life itself.’ [4]

Second wave feminism in the U.S.A. and Western Europe

In North America and in Western Europe, feminists in the 1970’s protested against the traditional dichotomy between men and women, against the different “gender” roles, whereby men embodied culture and women embodied nature. This dichotomy was used to justify male dominance. Modern humans (white males from the rich world) are the creators of culture whilst women are considered as a kind of second class variety of humans who have only a limited level of personnel qualities such as reason, courage, self control, freedom, capacities of autonomous ownership. This modern male gender role became the norm in society. It was developed during the period of the enlightenment – women remained in the shadow of nature, ‘knowing their place’.

Other typical images such as man the hunter, the – competitive and sexually active being were part of a dominant ideology justified by ‘scientific’ knowledge. Women were described as – passive, asexual beings who kept the wild instincts of the males under control. Proudhon (– a French 19th century socialist) spoke of women as an essential civilizing factor, thanks to their role in the family. You can easily understand that later on, many second wave feminists were not convinced when eco-feminists spoke about the special link all women have with nature!

But what is the precise nature of the domination of men over women and of the increasing destruction of the earth as an ecosystem? Is there a possible link between women’s oppression and the way nature is being destroyed? What is our vision of ‘human nature’ and what are the consequences of this vision for women’s liberation?

The industrial revolution and the capitalist mode of production.

By the end of the 18th Century, we see the development of a new mode of production, capitalism. The changes involved in this transformation had important consequences for the position of women in society. Large productive family units, involving several generations, of farmers and of artisans, were ultimately replaced by what is now called the (non-productive) ‘nuclear family’. At the centre of this family there was – the house wife, she is not productive because she is not employed as a worker in a factory, a company, a public service. employed as a worker in a factory, a company, a public service. The man is supposed to be the bread winner for his wife and children, he is the ‘head of the household’ and his wage is supposed to pay for the survival of all the members of his family. The household tasks done by the women are invisible, because they are not remunerated in the form of a wage. The woman is economically completely dependent upon her husband.

Of course, women (and children) have been working in the new factories from the very beginning of the factory system, – the struggles against child labour and for protective measures concerning health and safety, the fight for shorter working hours, etc., were combined with a new ideology on the natural

role of men and women. The ideal household is that of the nuclear family in which the man can afford to have a wife who stays at home. At the ideological level, the well known dichotomy between man (– reason, culture, public life, etc.) and women (– intuition, nature, private life, etc.) is reaffirmed. [5]

After the Second World War, the situation for women changed considerably with contraception, and the victorious fight of women for the right to choose abortion being an important part of this. New opportunities in education for women, the generalisation of paid work (outside the nuclear family) by women, also changed their position in relation to men. Look simply at rising divorce rates, they illustrate the increased autonomy of women who are not anymore completely dependant on their husband's wages.

But real economic equality was not achieved, women's traditional skills such as caring are valued less and women are paid less not only in those roles but even when they work alongside men, they are less paid and valued, they are pushed into part-time work – often because of the unavailability of child care, unemployment is more readily accepted in the case of women.

The fundamental reason for this state of affairs lays in the fact that women are the central caring figure in the family. In fact, women pay a high price for their increased economic freedom. They have to 'combine' their job with the domestic tasks (80% is done by women). Even when women can afford to buy more and more commodities like clothes, ready made food, etc, the central responsibility for the well being of all family members rests on their shoulders.

The feminists of the second wave criticized this state of affairs. Their demands for public services and for the collectivisation of the domestic tasks combined a critical view on the possibilities of women's liberation inside capitalism and a perspective of real liberation through the struggle for a democratic socialist society.

Women and the peace movement, women and ecology

The end of the seventies saw massive mobilisations in the US and in Western Europe against the installation of US nuclear weapons carrying cruise missiles in Europe. Normal 'housewives', not feminist at all, were very much involved. Women in the peace movement took the lead at the Greenham Common peace camp surrounding an important British military base. Many of these women had not taken part in the abortion and contraception campaigns; neither did they question their traditional role as housewives .

But in the peace movement, women developed a specific criticism of the so called traditional "male" values of aggression, of rational thinking (the logic of nuclear weapons and war games!), of blind faith in technology and hard science and of all kinds of "macho" attitudes.

This new, softer feminism found its place in the growing green movements and parties. Women rediscovered their history: witch burning, the medicalisation of the female body. Women felt at ease in the new green thinking, small was beautiful, an alternative life style was developed (from baking your own bread to herbal medicine).

An ecofeminist worldview was growing which accused patriarchy (the expression of 'male' values and attitudes) and the industrial system for destroying nature and ultimately life itself.

The analysis of the parallelism between the medical treatment of women as objects of science and the way agribusiness transform peasants into industrial plant and meat producers is indeed very powerful.

But I don't agree with those ecofeminists who point at patriarchy as the primary cause of these developments.

Can the simplistic and a-historical concept of patriarchy (in other words, the fundamental and eternal nature of all males) explain all that has happened in human society over the last 200 years? Looking at this recent history, we can see that the growth and development of the capitalist mode of production covering the whole world is at the centre of the changes described by both socialist feminists and ecofeminists.

The many activities performed by women in pre-capitalist societies (– in traditional medicine, in local food and clothes production, etc.) have been destroyed by the incorporation of these activities in the capitalist economy. The production of commodities for profit in the capitalist economy has taken over – the previously important production of use values for human needs.

Anticapitalist ecofeminist thinking

Second wave feminists stressed the potential of equality between genders through concrete demands like equal pay and opportunities, the right to choose, the fight against any discrimination on the basis of gender. They were convinced of the fundamental similarities between men and women. Their struggles linked the analysis of specific women's oppression with demands going against the capitalist logic such as more public services and the collectivisation of house hold tasks.

Many ecofeminists value “feminine” attitudes, ways of life that stand in contrast with masculine attitudes and behaviour. They sometimes became differentialists whereby the two genders are the expression of two deeply rooted (determined by biology) realities. Some ecofeminists developed identity politics against “man the cause of all evil”.

On the other hand socialist feminists also pointed out that sexual stereotyping was restrictive to both genders – man are not allowed to be carers without their sexuality being questioned for example. And of course these issues were and are taken up strongly by the LGBTQ movement who argued in favour of the dissolution of stereotypes and the valuing of qualities traditionally applied to each gender.

Other lines of thought in anticapitalist ecofeminist thinking are more interesting because they start from the basic contradiction of capitalism between the production of exchange value for profit and the production of use value in order to satisfy human needs.

If we look at society as an iceberg, with only one third of its volume floating above the surface and an invisible two thirds of the volume supporting the top, then we can describe society as follows.

The visible capitalist economy is characterised by wage labour, commodity production, exchange value, competition, growth, exploitation of the work force and of nature. This society can only continue to function if it is first of all supported by the invisible domestic work that women perform for the well being of adults and children, for the fulfilment of basic human needs and secondly, if the regeneration of all natural systems is guaranteed.

To build societies based on the well being of the many rather than the few, we need to put the work of social reproduction, the satisfaction of individual and social needs, the production of use value and the conservation of the biophysical base of life at the centre of our concerns and practices.

Ecological economics, which analyses and criticises the destruction of nature and the depletion of

resources under capitalist conditions, must be combined with feminist economics which puts the underestimated and largely invisible activities of women (necessary for sustaining day to day life and the well being of every individual), at the centre of its analysis, thus creating a new synergy between feminism and ecology.

The current crisis of civilisation is caused by multiple contradictions and tensions: between capital and labour, – between the capitalist mode of production as a whole and the preservation of nature (upon which every human depends), and finally the tension between the reproductive tasks, the fulfilment of human needs through use values on the one hand and the profit driven production of commodities on the other hand.

In this field full of tensions, there is a clear need for a strong link between the anticapitalist, the feminist as well as the ecological dimension of the struggles for an ecosocialist society.

The fight for women's liberation; the understanding of the strong affinities and similarities between the oppression of women and the oppression/exploitation of nature, can only strengthen the movement for human liberation in an ecosocialist society. Marijke Colle

[1]) SHIVA (V), The Seed and the Earth: women, ecology and biotechnology, in: The Ecologist 1/1992.

[2] The Belgian chocolate company Côte d'Or published in the 1950's, at the height of the Belgian rule in the Congo, photo albums with pictures of wildlife. One such album I will never forget. Its title was Faunaflor Congo and the last pages were pictures taken of black man and women on the market selling food. They were part of the last chapter on the great apes...

[3]) DESMOND (A.) & MOORE (J.), Darwin, Harmondsworth 1991

[4] SHIVA (V), The Seed and the Earth: women, ecology and biotechnology, op. cit.

[5] SHORTER (E.), The making of the modern family, London 1976

You can download those documents :

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Interview

What is ecofeminism?

HERRERO Yayo , TORTOSA Juan

28 November 2011

This interview was originally published in SolidaritéS Switzerland with the following introduction:

In French-speaking countries there is not much literature on ecofeminism and the little that does exist is spiritualistic ecofeminism. Furthermore, ecofeminism is viewed with considerable mistrust, including in radical ecologist milieux. On the one hand, they see this incipient movement as a mystical return to the earth and on the other hand they do not share the idea that by the simple fact of being a woman there is a more direct and different relation with nature.

To enlighten ourselves a little, we interviewed Yayo Herrero, professor at the National University of Long-distance Education in Madrid and co-coordinator of Ecologists in Action (Spain) - JT.

Juan Tortosa – What is ecofeminism and what is its history?

Yayo Herrero – Ecofeminism is a vast movement of women born from the consciousness of this double problematic and of the conviction that the struggles for both ecology and feminism contain the keys to human dignity and to sustainability in equality.

In the movements for the defence of land there were and are many women. We know the role of women in the Chipko movement in defence of the forests, in the movement against the dams on the Narmada river in India, in the struggle against the toxic residues of the Love Canal, at the origin of the movement for environmental justice in the United States, as well as their presence in the local movements of defence of communal lands, in the fight for urban public space or for healthy food. The ecologism of many poor women is an ecologism of those who depend directly on a protected environment to be able to live.

In the middle of the last century the first ecofeminism discussed the hierarchies established by Western thought and revalorized the terms of the dichotomy that had until then been depreciated: woman and nature. Masculine culture unleashed genocidal wars, devastation and poisoning of territories and the installation of despotic governments. The first ecofeminists denounced the effects of techno-science on the health of women and confronted militarism and environmental degradation. They understood these as manifestations of sexist culture. Petra Kelly is one of their representatives.

After this first ecofeminism, critical of masculinity, there followed other propositions, mainly coming from the South. These propositions considered women as bearers of respect for life. They accused Western “misdevelopment” of causing the poverty of women and indigenous populations, who are the first victims of the destruction of nature. This is perhaps the best-known ecofeminism. In this vast movement we find Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies and Ivone Guevara.

Going beyond the essentialism of these positions, other constructivist ecofeminists (Bina Agarwal, Val Plumwood) see in the interaction with the environment the origin of this particular ecologist consciousness of women. It is the sexual division of labour, the distribution of power and property

which have subjugated both women and the nature to which we all belong. The reductionist dichotomies of our Western culture must be broken in order to build a more respectful and freer way of living together.

The feminist movement has seen in ecofeminism a possible danger, given the bad historical use that patriarchy has made of the links between women and nature. Since the danger exists, it is necessary to delimit it. It is not a question of glorifying domestic life as being feminine, of again locking up women in a reproductive space, of refusing them access to culture, nor of making them responsible, if they do not have enough to do, for the enormous task of saving the planet and life. It is a question of unmasking submission, of defining responsibilities and of making men and women jointly responsible for the work of survival.

Q. Does there exist an anticapitalist ecofeminism and does it seek convergence with other anti-system social sectors? Must any emancipatory project integrate this concept? What are the principal elements of this ecofeminism?

The conception of work as it existed in preindustrial societies corresponded to the idea of an activity which proceeded in a continuous way and which was an integral part of human nature. However, roughly two centuries ago, there emerged a new conception which was forged from the myth of production and growth, which reduced the former broad vision to the field of waged industrial production.

This reduction of the broad concept of work to the sole sphere of remunerated employment occults the fact that in order for society and the socio-economic system to continue, the realization of a long list of tasks associated with human reproduction is essential: looking after children, taking care of the elderly, the satisfaction of basic needs, the promotion of health, emotional support, encouragement to social participation... Ultimately it means an enormous quantity of working time whose purpose is to ensure the satisfaction of human needs and the wellbeing of people, and which because of the sexual division of labour imposed by patriarchal ideology falls mainly on women within the home.

Classical economists, even if they do not concede that there is any economic value in this effort, at least recognized the importance of family domestic labour, and defined wages as the historical cost of reproduction of the working class. They tended to recognize the value of domestic labour, without however incorporating it into the analytical frameworks of economic science.

This contradiction disappears almost completely with neo-classical economics, which institutionalizes definitively the separation between public and private space, between commodity production and domestic production, marginalizing and occulting the latter. It is this segregation of roles which allowed men to engage in full-time wage labour without the constraints that are constituted by tasks related to the care of individuals and the family and the maintenance of conditions of hygiene in the home. Thus a definition of the economy is imposed which is not concerned with the sexual division of labour and does not recognize the crucial role of domestic work in the reproduction of the capitalist system.

However, although care work is frequently regarded as separate from the productive environment, it ensures the production of a "raw material" that is essential for the conventional economic process: the labour force.

The capitalist system is incapable, within the framework of its own relations of production, of

reproducing the labour force that it needs. Daily, but especially generational reproduction, requires an enormous quantity of time and energy which the system would be incapable of remunerating. The processes of education, socialization and care for the elderly are complex and imply affection and emotions which allow everyone to develop in a certain framework of security.

Anticapitalist ecofeminist thinking defends the idea that the socio-economic system has the form of an iceberg. The market is the floating and visible part of it. Under the surface, with a much greater mass, there is the work of maintenance of life. These two parts of the iceberg are well differentiated. The principal one is dissimulated, hidden from view, but both constitute an indivisible unity. The bloc of wage labour and the conventional economy rests on and is supported by the submerged ice of domestic work and regeneration of natural systems. The invisibility of the sphere centred on the satisfaction of basic needs and wellbeing, which absorbs tensions, is essential for keeping the system afloat.

We can say that there exists a major contradiction between the process of natural and social reproduction and the process of accumulation of capital. If social reproduction and maintenance of life were the dominant aspect of the economy, activity would be directed towards the direct production of goods of use value and not exchange value, and wellbeing would be an end in itself.

To prioritise the two logics at the same time is impossible. It is thus necessary to choose one of them. Since the market does not have as its main aim the satisfaction of human needs, there is no sense in making it the privileged centre of social organization.

Making profits and economic growth should no longer condition the distribution of time, the organization of space and the different human activities. To build societies based on wellbeing, it is necessary to articulate them around social reproduction and the satisfaction of needs, without belittling the importance of the biophysical base that allows our species to exist.

Heterodox economic conceptions have a lot to contribute at a time when economic science is being reconfigured. Ecological economics shows us that a good part of economic activity is harmful to life, that it consumes significant amounts of resources without generating wellbeing, and that it even creates misery. Feminist economics inverts the category of work and puts back at the centre of things the historically scorned and underestimated activity of women, activity which is however the basis of daily life. With other sectors of critical economics, these different conceptions and approaches are essential to building a new model.

To recognize us as vulnerable beings requiring the attention of other people during our life cycle allows to redefine and supplement the concept of labour-capital conflict and to affirm that this conflict goes beyond just the tension between capital and wage labour and reflects a tension between capital and all labour, that which is paid and that which is carried out for nothing.

Let us also remember that, in an ecological perspective, the fundamental contradiction which exists between the present economic metabolism and the durability of the biosphere brings out an important synergy between ecologist and feminist conceptions. The ecological perspective demonstrates the physical impossibility of a society centred on growth. Feminism makes this conflict palpable in our daily lives and denounces the logic of accumulation and growth as being a patriarchal and androcentric logic. The insoluble and radical (at the root) tension which exists between the capitalist economic system and the sustainability of human life demonstrates, in reality, an essential opposition between capital and life.

Putting the satisfaction of basic needs and wellbeing in conditions of equality as the objective of society and of the economic process represents an important change of perspectives. It situates the satisfaction of the needs which make it possible for individuals to grow, to develop and to live with dignity, just like work and the production that is socially necessary for that, as a structuring axis of society and consequently of analyses. In this new perspective, women are not secondary beings, nor are they dependent, but active beings, actresses of their own history, who create cultures and values of work that are different from those of the capitalist and patriarchal model.

Juan Tortosa

* Translation International Viewpoint <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

* French original available on ESSF (article 23599).

* Juan Tortosa is a leading member of CADTM in Switzerland.

The Woman Question

A quote from:

Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx, *The Woman Question*, in *Westminster Review*, 1886

“The truth, not fully recognised even by those anxious to do good to woman, is that she, like the labour-classes, is in an oppressed condition; that her position, like theirs, is one of merciless degradation. Women are the creatures of an organised tyranny of men, as the workers are the creatures of an organised tyranny of idlers. Even where this much is grasped, we must never be weary of insisting on the non-understanding that for women, as for the labouring classes, no solution of the difficulties and problems that present themselves is really possible in the present condition of society. All that is done, heralded with no matter what flourish of trumpets, is palliative, not remedial. Both the oppressed classes, women and the immediate producers, must understand that their emancipation will come from themselves. Women will find allies in the better sort of men, as the labourers are finding allies among the philosophers, artists, and poets. But the one has nothing to hope from man as a whole, and the other has nothing to hope from the middle class as a whole.”

Our methods of struggle - On the autonomous women's movement
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2. The oppression of women as a sex constitutes the objective basis for the mobilization of women in struggle through their own organizations. For that reason the Fourth International supports and helps build the women's liberation movement.

By the women's movement we mean all the women who organize themselves at one level or another to struggle against the oppression imposed on them by this society: women's liberation groups, consciousness-raising groups, neighborhood groups, student groups, groups organized at workplaces, trade-union commissions, organizations of women of oppressed nationalities, lesbian-feminist groups, action coalitions around specific demands. The women's movement is characterized by its heterogeneity, its penetration into all layers of society, and the fact that it is not tied to any particular political organization, even though various currents are active within it. Moreover, some groups and action coalitions, though led and sustained by women, are open to men as well, such as the National Organization for Women in the United States and the National Abortion Campaign in Britain.

While most women's groups initially developed outside the mass organizations of the working class, the deepening radicalization has led more and more working-class women to find ways to organize themselves within their class organizations. In Spain, large numbers of women joined the COs (Workers' Commissions) and brought life to their women's committees. In France, thousands of women now participate in trade-union commissions as well as Family Planning organizations and women's groups. In Bolivia, miners' wives have formed housewives' committees affiliated to the COB (Bolivian Workers Federation).

But all these are forms of the turbulent and still largely unstructured reality called the independent or autonomous women's movement.

By independent or autonomous we do not mean independent of the class struggle or the needs of the working class. On the contrary, only by fusing the objectives and demands of the women's movement with the struggle of the working class will the necessary forces be assembled to achieve women's goals.

By independent or autonomous we mean that the movement is organized and led by women; that it takes the fight for women's rights and needs as its first priority, refusing to subordinate that fight to any other interests; that it is not subordinate to the decisions or policy needs of any political tendency or any other social group; that it is willing to carry through the fight by whatever means and together with whatever forces prove necessary.

Clearly, not every group within the movement measures up to those criteria fully or equally, but such is the character of the independent women's liberation movement we seek to build.

3. The dominant organizational form of the women's movement has been all- female groups. These have emerged in virtually all arenas from the schools and churches to the factories and trade unions. This expresses the determination of women to take the leadership of their own organizations in which they can learn and develop and lead without fear of being put down or dictated to by men or having to compete with them from the start.

Before women can lead others they must throw off their feelings of inferiority and self-deprecation.

They must learn to lead themselves. Feminist groups that consciously and deliberately exclude men help many women to take the first steps toward discarding their own slave mentality, gaining confidence, pride, and courage to act as political beings.

The small "consciousness raising" groups that have emerged everywhere as one of the most prevalent forms of the new radicalization help many women to realize that their problems do not arise from personal shortcomings, but are socially created and common to other women.

If they remain inward-turned and limit themselves to discussion circles as a substitute for joining with others to act, they can become an obstacle to the further political development of the women involved. But they most often lay the groundwork for women to break out of their isolation for the first time, to gain confidence, and to move into action.

The desire of women to organize themselves in all-female groups is the opposite of the practice followed by many mass Stalinist parties that organize separate male and female youth organizations for the purpose of repressing sexual activity and reinforcing sex-stereotyped behavior- i.e., the inferiority of women. The independent all-female groups that have emerged today express in part the distrust many radicalizing women feel for the mass reformist organizations of the working class, which have failed so miserably to fight for their needs.

Our support for and work to build the independent women's liberation movement distinguishes the Fourth International today from many sectarian groups that claim to stand on Marxist orthodoxy as represented by their interpretations of the resolutions of the first four congresses of the Third International. Such groups reject the construction of any women's organizations except those tied directly to and under the political control of their party.

To those "Marxists" who claim that women's liberation groups organized on the basis of women only divide the working class along sex lines, we say it is not those fighting against their oppression who are responsible for creating or maintaining divisions. Capitalism divides the working class-by race, by sex, by age, by nationality, by skill levels, and by every other means possible. Our job is to organize and support the battles of the most oppressed and exploited layers who are raising demands that represent the interests of the entire class and who will lead the struggle for socialism. Those who suffer most from the old will fight the most energetically for the new.

4. The forms through which we work can vary greatly depending on the concrete circumstances in which our organizations find themselves. Our tactics are dictated by our strategic aim, which is to educate and lead in action forces much broader than ourselves, especially the decisive forces of the working class, to help build a mass women's liberation movement, to strengthen a class-struggle wing of the women's movement, and to recruit the best cadre to the revolutionary party.

Factors that must be taken into account include the strength of our own forces; the size, character, and political level of the women's liberation forces; the strength of the liberal, Social Democratic, Stalinist, and centrist forces against whom we must contend; and the general political context in which we are working. It's a tactical question whether we should organize women's liberation groups on a broad socialist program, work through existing organizations of the women's liberation movement, build broad action coalitions around specific issues, work through trade-union commissions or caucuses in other mass organizations, combine several of these activities, or work through some altogether different forms.

No matter what organizational form we adopt, the fundamental question to be decided is the same: what specific issues and demands should be raised under the given circumstances in order to most effectively mobilize women and their allies in struggle?

5. There is no contradiction between supporting and building all-female organizations to fight for women's liberation, or for specific demands relating to women's oppression, and simultaneously building mass action coalitions involving both men and women to fight for the same demands. Campaigns around the right to abortion have provided a good example of this. Women will be the backbone of such campaigns, but since the fight is in the interests of the working masses as a whole, our perspective is to win support for the movement from all organizations of the working class and the oppressed.

6. Our perspective of trying to mobilize masses of women in action can often best be achieved in the present period through united-front-type action campaigns, which mobilize the broadest possible support around concrete demands. This is all the more true, given the relative weakness of the sections of the Fourth International and the relative strength of the liberals and our reformist, class-collaborationist opponents. For many women and men, participation in the actions organized by such campaigns has been their first step toward support for the political goals of the women's liberation movement. The united-front-type abortion campaigns in numerous countries provide an example of this type of action.

Through such united-front-type actions we can bring the greatest power to bear against the capitalist government and educate women and the working class concerning their own strength. Insofar as the liberal "friends" of women, the Stalinists, Social Democrats, and trade-union bureaucrats refuse to support such united campaigns for women's needs, they will isolate and expose themselves by their own inaction, opposition, or willingness to subordinate women's needs to their search for an alliance with the supposedly "progressive" sectors of the ruling class. And if mass pressure obliges them to support such actions, this can only broaden the mass appeal of the campaigns and increase the contradictions within the reformist and liberal forces.

As we have already seen so clearly around the abortion question, such united-front-type action campaigns are of particular importance in deepening the interaction between the independent women's movement and the labor movement, since they put the greatest pressure on the labor bureaucracy to respond.

Governments owe a debt toward women, not toward banks

10 October 2012 by World March of Women

Dear friends of WMW,

Under the slogan **“Governments owe a debt toward women, not toward banks. Marching together for decent, sustainable lives”**, our sisters from Europe have officially launched their campaign against debt and austerity. You can follow the actions in the different countries to the WMW European website: <http://femmeseneurope.eu/>

The campaign is being built in alliance with other social movements and organizations such as CADTM. Among the various actions already carried out for the campaign is a video with testimonials by women, and the Portuguese NCB’s initiative to organize a feminist, anti-austerity protest.

Find attached the manifest of the campaign. We request you to share this information widely among your contacts.

In feminist struggle and solidarity,

WMW International Secretariat

Governments owe a debt toward women, not toward banks

Marching together for decent, sustainable lives

In this dark period of austerity, it is with indignation that we observe the worsening standards of living for women on our continent, particularly in Southern Europe. In many European countries, the economic crisis has been used to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the few, overexploiting the workforce, limiting democratic practices, repressing social and citizens’ movements, and increasing hate and divisions between different sectors of the population.

European leadership is plundering our lives and our rights, driving our society into a state of emergency in which we, as women, are most affected by both budget cuts and the conservative policies of liberal

governments that want to impose values based on a “return to the home” and the model of the nuclear family, against which feminists have fought so hard. We, as women, suffer the effects of the economic and social crises differently, because we are positioned differently in the hierarchies of economic, political, social, cultural and symbolic power. The division of labor is an expression of the hierarchical organization of functions and people, as well as social ideas and representations of the technical divisions of the productive process and the social relations involved in that process, and which distribute workers into different activities.

We demand decent lives in which people are the central focus of life, lives that value care-taking in the face of an economy that is not just some abstract idea or a series of faraway decisions, but rather that defines and affects the everyday lives of the people. Lives that are at risk because of the austerity policies driven by the financial markets that push States to rescue banks when the duty of governments is, instead, to rescue the people.

Marching together for women's right to economic sovereignty

Women cannot have economic sovereignty under the capitalist system. The imposed austerity measures call the economic autonomy of women into question, increasing their unemployment rate and duration, the instability of their employment, the wage gap between men and women, and gender differentiation in retirement pay and other pensions. Women, who already accounted for the majority of the poor, will, under these measures, be even poorer and, consequently, more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Cuts to public investment, for example, in support services and facilities for minors and the elderly, and the commodification of access to housing, are among the obvious impacts of the crisis, which have largely hindered women's independence. In addition, cuts in State welfare expenses always entail an increase in unpaid housework and care-taking (typically performed by women). In this way, companies have access to a workforce that is always available, which can be hired during booms and dismissed during crises.

There is a major risk of widening the inequalities in the uses of men's and women's time in the family. The culturally-accepted idea that women belong to the reproductive sphere and that men no longer have any material or emotional responsibility in caring for the home, and the children and the elderly in the family, is taking firmer hold. All this is on the rise through neo-conservative, austere thinking, which seeks to impose values of "women back to the home" and "family" and welfare policies of submitting individual rights to a single, exclusive family model, which makes real avenues for women's emancipation more difficult.

Conceptions of the economy and employment must include women's work as part of the productive sphere, work that is not performed in traditional" work environments like factories, offices, etc. We want to see social justice policies, job stimulus policies and non-discriminatory / emancipatory policies, that guarantee social and labor rights and avenues for economic and social development.

The political and public development of a culture of recognition of work with the associated rights is both necessary and urgent, in all spheres of life, as is the inclusion of gender equality in all matters of public policy. We have the right to decent lives, not just to survival.

Marching together for women's right to a life free from violence

We live in patriarchal societies based on gender violence that results in the death and injury of thousands of European women every day. This involves physical, sexual and psychological violence, but also symbolic violence that subordinates women, in which area the State has shirked its responsibilities.

We denounce the double, and sometimes even triple, discrimination suffered by immigrant women, black women, women with disabilities, lesbians, Romany women, young women, elderly women and transsexuals, all of whom are denied their basic civil rights and have been directly affected by these regressive policies.

We demand regard for a life without violence, whether perpetrated by the State, policies, security forces, our sisters, or the stereotypical, discriminatory images that restrict women to pre-determined, subordinate roles.

Marching together for people to be the central focus of life

The people's well-being must be the central focus of all political, economic and social activity. Unfortunately, we are witnessing quite the opposite phenomenon: the stigmatization of people, the underestimation of their abilities, the deterioration of their standards of living, and their loss of all possibilities of escaping this situation created by the financial sector. Private, often hidden, interests are put before the public interest, and hegemonic policies and ideas have been devastating in terms of public opinion, generating feelings of insecurity, fear about the future, depression, isolation and a breakdown in social interactions.

We want to be a part of the solution, but we cannot accept the hegemonic myths and narratives, which are so indulgent and defeatist, which treat markets like "neutral," "innocent" structures and which tend to legitimize the current austerity policies based on an ideology of competition, maximizing and centralizing profits, and rejecting all forms of social responsibility.

Marching together for women's right to health

Faced with the privatization of healthcare and a sexist, hetero-patriarchal health model that denies women's right to control our own bodies, we demand that our bodies cease to be used as the battlefield for chauvinistic power plays and that our sexual and reproductive rights be fully recognized and guaranteed.

Since the start of the crisis, we have seen a very troubling and harmful reduction in investments in national public health services across Europe. In some cases, this has even led to privatization, which has a very significant impact on some of the most important aspects of women's lives, like family planning, support during pregnancy and motherhood, abortion, and the prevention of sexually-transmitted diseases, to name just a few.

Full access to high-quality public health services and treatment for everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic background, place of residence, ethnic group, sexual orientation, religion or gender identity, must be ensured.

In this, as in other areas, we cannot and will not accept profoundly conservative values that seek, once again, to take control of our bodies and our lives.

Marching together for women's right to a sustainable livelihood

We need to develop economic alternatives that place the sustainable development of human lives, the environment and collective well-being at the center of the economic and regional fabric. We want control over our own lives!

Food sovereignty for the people, and defending the primary sector and small production firms, in which women have always held a fundamental, yet highly invisible, role, must be a priority.

We reject the infinite growth production model that depletes the planet's resources, and we reject the

privatization of access to essential natural resources like water and land, of which women are the primary victims. The way in which women's work is exploited as an inexhaustible resource by patriarchal, racist capitalism is very similar to the way in which nature is exploited. The crisis in the system is, in fact, a crisis of its organization and structure. The process of commodifying people's relationships with nature and with their bodies must be confronted.

Marching together for women's right to education

In view of the current policies restricting the population's access to education, we demand the right to universal, free public education, that is not sexist and that promotes equality as an educational model focusing on people and their training, and not on the production of "manpower" for the capitalist system.

We reject the privatization of education. Education is a core human right, not a business.

We will defend free access to culture and reject its gentrification. We demand policies that enable universal access to culture and that defend and promote the culture of all peoples, in the face of the homogenizing discourse of capitalist globalization.

Marching together for women's right to political sovereignty

Faced with societies that are becoming less and less democratic, in terms of how decisions are made by private bodies, and faced with the crisis of representativeness in public institutions and the criminalization of social movements, it is clear to us that our democracies have been hijacked and that we urgently need to free them.

We need to build mechanisms that represent citizens' movements, from a feminist perspective, for the critical, moral and democratic examination of political and financial options. We demand a feminist citizens' audit of public debt, with the goal of canceling all illegitimate debt.

We need a Europe that respects its States' sovereignty and that guarantees democratic control by all its citizens. A Europe of the people that defends the rights of nations without States to determine their own futures.

We want democracy in all aspects of our lives.

We, as women, want to control our lives and build a more just society that will put an end to the capitalist, patriarchal system and that will allow us all to enjoy decent lives.

This is our pledge.

Source: <http://femmeseneurope.eu>