

# *Ecofeminism, patriarchy and female subordination in criminal organizations*

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## Abstract

*What is the relationship between the oppression of women and the domination of nature? What is the relationship between ecofeminism, gender stereotypes and the subordination of women in criminal organizations? This study aims to investigate the links between the culture of oppression, which also passes through the brutalization of the territory, and the taking root of the criminal culture that imposes submission, blind and uncritical obedience and silence on women.*

*Keywords: Gender stereotypes; Women; Oppression; Domination of nature; Criminal organizations.*

## I. ORIGINS OF ECOFEMINISM

Feminist reflection has constantly questioned history, especially ancient history in order to understand the origins and causes of gender asymmetry and the sexual division of labor. Looking at the historical process from the point of view of the oppressed, making them re-enter history, listening to their voices, rebuilding their struggle for emancipation, is essential for anyone who takes a perspective of change.

Making use of the numerous studies on the origin of patriarchy carried out since the nineteenth century, scholars, trying to understand the obscure reasons for the original violence, have investigated in depth the link between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature, between the exploitation of women and the paradigm of unlimited accumulation and growth, revealing the intertwining of injustices and oppressions in which patriarchy and capitalism have firmly united.

The debate on the birth and affirmation of the patriarchate has ancient origins, but starting from the 1870s, both in Europe and in America, it drew new impetus from the flourishing of numerous ethnographic, historical and anthropological studies.

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The works of Jakob Bachofen, Lewis Morgan, Friedrich Engels, Otis Tufton Mason, had shown that the oppression of women was a product of history; the widespread idea that the patriarchal family was immutable and eternal, based on a law of nature, was nothing but a myth (Taylor Allen, 1999).

The patriarchy, in fact, had established itself in a recent era following economic and social changes. The development of agricultural activity and above all of livestock farming, traditionally practiced by men, and the consequent accumulation of wealth in their hands, introduced the concept of private property, shook the ancient noble societies, destroyed the collectivism typical of matrifocal societies, led to the enslavement of women, the emergence of war and slavery and the male monopoly of culture. The conquest of other groups took the form of the killing of men and the slavery of women and children for domestic work, land and sexual services.

From the studies on ancient societies, even with their unresolved questions and dark areas, it emerged that the greatest obstacle to the humanization process of women was and is the way of conceiving work and productivity that has established itself with patriarchy and it has been carried to the extreme consequences by capitalist development.

This unproductive, predatory mode of appropriation became the paradigm of all exploitative relationships between human beings. The main mechanism is that which transforms autonomous human producers into production conditions for others or which defines them as natural resources for others (Mies, 1986: 66, 2005).

These are the cultural premises from which the cultural movement that goes by the name of Ecofeminism got its start.

The term ecofeminism appeared for the first time in 1974 in a paper by Françoise d'Eaubonne, *Le féminisme ou la mort*. In it, the French feminist focused on the environmental costs of 'development' and identified women as the subjects of change. In 1978 she founded the *Écologie et Féminisme* movement which had little resonance in France, but which aroused great interest in Australia and the United States.

In the 1970s, women's movements that developed spontaneously around the world revealed the connection between women's health and life and the destruction of nature. The awareness of female vulnerability in the face of environmental degradation and the desire to have a voice in decision-making processes shared those struggles that arose spontaneously.

In 1973 the chipko movement began in defense of the Himalayan forests and the subsistence economy carried out by women in harmony with nature. In 1977 Wangari Maathai started the reforestation project in Kenya whose main objectives were the promotion of a positive image of women and their autonomy (Weber, 1988; Michaelson, 1994; Shiva, 2002; Maathai, 2006, 2010).

Between 1980 and 1981 two major events made the movement visible internationally: in 1980 in Washington two thousand women surrounded the Pentagon to protest against nuclear power and in 1981 the protest took place

at the Greenham Common missile base in England. The possible annihilation of the planet by destructive technology was among the first concerns of those protests. The theme of the relationship between science, women, nature was among the first to which the attention of ecofeminist thought turned.

“I know I am made of this earth, as my mother’s hands were made of this earth, as her dreams came from this earth... everything I know speaks to me through this earth” (Griffin, 1978: 227). So wrote Susan Griffin in 1978 in the Opera *Women and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, a founding text of ecofeminist thought. In this “poem that includes history” (Cantrell, 1996: 198), alternating scenarios of the oppression of women and nature, the author traces the history of Western civilization.

Starting from the considerations contained in this volume, it can be said that even today the female world struggles to obtain the right recognition. In particular, there is a tendency towards the debasement of feminist battles that have led to the painful conquest of the spaces that women occupy in their personal and working lives (Ulivieri, 2015). The distorted narratives on the representation of the feminine are still anchored to its downsizing, due to the persistent enhancement of a single model considered valid and successful: that of the man, white, heterosexual, normotypical and skilled. In this sense moves the devaluation of the empathic dimension of compassion and care, product of the androcentric cultural model, which has, over the centuries, attributed these characteristics to the female world and, according to a perspective of polarization and dichotomization, has exalted all that which is andros and considered minus everything that is considered feminine. The male and the masculine continue to be the measure of all things and this inevitably produces separation and marginalization of the female world even in the evolved western world, which continues to promote dualized representations of reality, starting from the mind/body dichotomy, up to the equally famous ones of culture/nature, sky/earth. These formulas, which evoke the inexorable idea of opposition, do not favor the affirmation of ecological education in a systemic sense, because the placement of man and woman on different levels responds to the logic of a separation based on the principle according to which man places on a higher plane than the woman. Man embodies reason, spirit, heaven, culture, and therefore logos, while woman is placed on the opposite level: emotion, matter, earth, nature and obviously bios (Eaton & Lorenzen, 2003).

Woman, therefore, more earthly and natural, is inevitably secondary and subordinate, just as the Earth is subordinate and exploitable. This means that a development model conditioned by this type of factor cannot dialogue effectively with diversity (Sachs, 1998), ending up building a monocultural world (Shiva, 1993).

For this reason, Laura Marchetti attempts to deconstruct this model through the concept of *Matria*, a highly symbolic word, rich in semantic implications and resonances, in opposition to a long tradition of patriarchal power (Marchetti, 2014, 2021). A new hermeneutic *koinè* that recalls the metaphor of the Earth as a nurturing mother, seat of generativity, in-

timacy, home, welcome, protection and as an antidote to the archetypal concept of homeland. Assuming the horizon of an ecological and gender perspective as a privileged observation point, the author wants to highlight how the Earth can prefigure itself as a *tópos* of educational planning, to promote a culture of peace and human dialogue.

The paradigm of the Earth as a nurturing mother refers to a great metaphor of the universality of the maternal conscience, for an ethics of civil commitment aimed at protecting life and nature and all those values that interconnect humanity and the rest of the living world.

The Earth as a “giver of life”, is a non-discriminatory place that nourishes and protects, a welcoming and hospitable place in which to be naturally accepted and recognized as members of a single community.

This is the focus of ecofeminism, which calls us to question ourselves on the intersections between environmentalism and gender issues, on the parallel between the subordination of women and the degradation of nature and on tremendous ideological hierarchies on which society builds systematic justifications for the domination (power-over power) of some groups over others: man over woman, culture over nature, race over race, organized crime against the law.

In the latter context, the subordination of women in the unwritten rules of organized crime reflects the paradigm of the predominance over nature, over others and over women themselves, which must only be functional to the survival of the group in order to guarantee the family strength which is its lifeblood.

It is on these connections that the theme of ecofeminism meets that of the role of women in organized crime in Southern Italy, in which social inequalities still persist, because the patriarchal system expresses a hateful idea of domination, domination over women, over the poorest countries and over nature.

## 2. LINKS BETWEEN ECOFEMINISM, FAMILY, PATRIARCHY AND FEMALE SUBORDINATION IN CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

In the Calabrian criminal organization, the family represents the real strength of the organization. The ‘Ndrangheta (this is the name of organized crime in Calabria Region, South of Italy) was born as an organization structured for families, each of which has full powers both over the territory where it operates, and over the members of the family itself. Thus the clan exploits land, women and children for the sole purpose of strengthening the criminal organization.

Calabria is a very complex and restless land, brutalized by the criminal hand that has devastated landscapes of poignant beauty, archaeological sites, natural parks to increase the enormous volume of business it already manages and assert its strength in the area.

It is an eternally unfinished place and symbolically represented by unfinished houses, by the concrete that hides the shame of its peasant tradition redeemed by the Calabrian who emigrated in America, who have redesigned the geography of the countries of origin, cultivating the secret ambition to replace the aristocratic-feudal power, without ever wishing to change the true meaning of belonging to a beautiful and difficult land.

The only constant feature of this ancestral restlessness is incompleteness; not only that of the houses waiting to be finished by their children, or grandchildren or whoever will come later, but also the incompleteness of the countless public works never finished: dams, disused factories built with the mirage of work and prosperity, beds of dried up rivers that today house only debris and garbage, precarious shacks on the edges of villages and unstable fences that delimit a space, often an uncultivated, unproductive land, which luxuriantly generates gorse and wildflowers in spite of the man who just needs to symbolically mark that that enclosed space belongs to him, without caring about it. Because only the affirmation of possession of that space counts, the rest does not matter, it has no value.

In a land – even morphologically – disintegrated, the process of progressive construction of the community is tiring, at times impossible. As is the culture of bonding with others and the affirmation of the principle according to which it is the law that regulates everyone's lives.

The relationship with places also tells a lot about family relationships, woven through the force of blood, which holds the members of the nucleus and keeps out everything else, which is an enemy, a stranger, a fearful one.

The sense of domination over space is reflected in the history of family ties, to which the same canon has traditionally been applied, the one that for centuries has legitimized and endorsed the concept of domination over women and children.

The same predatory force that the criminal organization hurls against the territory, exploited and plundered, is also hurled against the women enslaved to the power of the clan that asks them to subordinate and stereotyped roles of wives and mothers capable of transmitting deviant cultural values from a generation the other to secure power for an indefinite time.

That women are the future of the gangs, the glue of the family, 'Ndrangheta knows well. The centrality of the family amplifies the concrete importance of female figures, albeit formally denied by the culture of subordination. And this is so much true that over time the women of the 'Ndrangheta have added to the function of 'internal containment' the increasingly explicit function of intermediaries in the 'external' activities of the clan.

But what happens in the 'Ndrangheta if women break the bond and decide to talk to the police? The results are disconcerting.

When a woman starts talking to the police and reveal the organization's secrets, the system 'goes mad', because the woman is considered the means of consolidating and transmitting family codes: she educates, forges, holds the structure together. If a woman decides to speak in the 'Ndrangheta and beyond, she does not exclusively destroy the family, she destroys the system.

Crossing the border means breaking the bonds of belonging, thus questioning one's identity and reconstructing it according to other points of reference (Sciarrone, 2006).

The stories of the women of the 'Ndrangheta who decide to collaborate with justice follow the just evoked concatenation of events, their attempt to free themselves from the grip of the organization crime matures in the existential sphere, and is transformed into the request for greater independence.

It is clear that the affirmation of a new self, of one's own subjectivity disconnected from the criminal context leads to painful choices, choices that mark a clear fracture between them and the mafia family.

How much these choices are feared by the men of 'Ndrangheta has been seen in the dramatic stories of Lea Garofalo and Maria Concetta Cacciola: the fear of the breaking of the family pact, of the telluric movement that arises from within, has marked their fate of death, useful both to stop the judicial action, and to recompose the stability of the organization system under the aegis of terror.

With physical, psychological violence, with underhanded torture and moral blackmail, the men of the mafia family tried to heal the fracture caused by the voices of women, relying on violence and yet another attempt to subordinate them. This is why it is possible to say that the 'Ndrangheta is so afraid of them and applies the paradigm of domination and destruction to assert its strength always and in any case.

In the face of the disruptive choice to collaborate with Justice, undertaken by some courageous Calabrian women, it is natural to reflect on the fact that the female voices of 'Ndrangheta represent the anti-'ndrangheta par excellence: in their choices there is a desire to break with the mafia world even stronger.

For many years, the role of women within mafia-type organizations was ignored or underestimated, as if their presence were invisible and irrelevant to the outside. All this has allowed the women of the clans to move skillfully in the sphere of illegality, becoming a strong point of organizations, silent accomplices of a code to be handed down, an active part in relational dynamics, in the transmission of information and in the internal management of the organization.

The vestals of the pedagogy of believing and obeying have carried out their duty as educators of the mafia culture with self-denial and for a long time, keeping firm the morality of the 'family'. They transmitted the information to and from the prison to the men inmates of the family, they managed the assets during the absence of fathers, brothers and relatives, often in the belief that they were carrying out their role scrupulously, even when this meant violating the law.

The women of 'Ndrangheta have traditionally identified themselves first of all as 'wives of...', 'mothers of...', 'sisters of...' with the main task of making the family cell reproduce, which is at the basis of the formation of other cells criminals.

Totally absorbed by the family dimension, they contributed to the overlap between affections and criminal affairs, to the point of confusing them.

This has made it increasingly difficult and more tragic, therefore, to decide to cut the threads of this well-structured canvas. Women ‘whose experiences often recall those of the heroines of Greek tragedies, torn between opposing tensions poised between several instances, torn in their choices’.

Starting from scratch, without following the suffocating taxes of the blood family, marks a turning point for them, a moment of transition that requires the acquisition of a new identity status that is difficult to achieve, because it generates suffering, requires the tiring and painful deconstruction of deeply rooted affective and relational codes and also based on the biological role that the mafia attributes to women and that allows them to ‘count’ within the dominant male system.

They have the task of perpetuating ‘the species’ through procreation and are raised in the cultivation of the feeling of gratification towards this recognition that comes from the male world.

Since childhood, women born in the criminal context, come into contact with the mafia reality of which they assimilate the characters even in silence. This peculiar learning process is clearly explained by a sentence that the Calabrian collaborator of justice Giuseppina Pesce pronounced to the magistrates after starting her path of collaboration: “Being inside a family you hear these talks, where you go, also... that is, even not being part of it, not taking part in the speeches but you hear them, that’s it! Eh, you have to live there! It does not mean, however, that they share each other, eh, this I wanted to point out... I know, however, it does not mean that they are things that... that is, maybe, it hurts to know them and also hurt to hear them and even breathe them”.

“These things also hurt to know and breathe them” says Giuseppina Pesce and it is precisely the verb to breathe that, more than any other word, clarifies to what extent and how women absorb information, speeches like sponges, the phrases, becoming the guardians of a secret that is sent forward thanks to silence.

This is why when the educational process is interrupted, when women decide to talk, thus moving away from the suffocating male chauvinist system, and decide to breathe new air, the chain of transmission of the code of honor is broken.

This is what happened to Calabrian women who in recent years have decided to break the silence, in search of new and autonomous ways of expression.

Often these are very young women who choose, going through a process that is certainly painful and full of obstacles, to distinguish the world of affections from that of crime and begin an intense collaboration with the justice system.

In many cases they are wives of fugitives or sentenced to life in prison for mafia crimes, real white widows who cannot bear, as in the past, the weight of sentimental and emotional loneliness. And precisely in the sign

of recovering the sphere of feelings, they choose to collaborate by affecting the founding values of mafia-type organizations.

The women who talk to Justice strongly shake the system and thus become the hope of the new generations and the way to go in the fight against organized crime. They find the courage to undertake these paths because they know how to restart from interrupted emotions, stifled by a process of growth in the name of their denial.

It is no coincidence that the silent revolution, born from the irrepressible need to respond to the call of the soul, started from its own female world, because the bond that the patriarchal tradition had established between women, men and family obligations was overturned by women themselves in a positive sense, assuming a liberating meaning, just as the ecofeminist Griffin has always wished.

In fact, the author just mentioned suggests that acquiring a deep awareness of our origins, our present and our purpose means acquiring full awareness of the interconnection with every single plant, animal and human life, forming a single body with the planet.

On the other hand, Rosemary Ruether Radford already stated in 1975 that “Women must realize that for them there can be no liberation nor can there be a solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships is that of domination (Ruether Radford, 1975: 204, 1993, 1994, 1996).

This approach was confirmed in a writing, which appeared in 1987, by the American philosopher Karen Warren whose reflection, together with that of the Australian Val Plumwood (1993, 1994), had a great influence. In *Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections*, Warren (1987) urged feminists to turn their attention to ecological problems and identify the connections between environmental degradation, sexism and other forms of social oppression.

All the themes of feminist and ecofeminist reflection: the critique of rationalism, the connection between women and nature in Western theological and philosophical traditions, the ethics of care, the animal question were addressed with a philosophical-cultural slant aimed at enhancing differences and interconnections. Ecofeminist analyzes are structurally intercultural (Warren, 1994, 1996, 2000).

Karen Warren would later write:

What makes ecofeminism multicultural is the fact that it includes in its analysis of women-nature connection, the inextricable interconnection of all social systems of domination, for example, racism, classism, ethnocentrism, imperialism, colonialism and discrimination with respect to age, affective preferences, and so on Street. It takes into account different cultures (Warren, 1994: 2).

The investigation into the links between ecofeminism and the role of women in organized crime in Calabria confirms that life on earth is a net-



work of interconnections and there is no natural hierarchy; the hierarchy is a creation of human beings that is projected onto nature and used to justify oppression: sexual, social, racial and so on.

### 3. COMMON TRAITS OF ALL SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

Sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, androcentrism, patriarchy and domination of the territory of criminal organizations are phenomena that are all systems of oppression that reinforce each other and lead to the degradation of life and the destruction of nature. What oppressed groups have in common – women, colonized peoples, the poor – is the fact that each has been equated with nature, considered part of nature, outside the sphere of reason and history.

The category of ‘nature’ is primarily a political category. Putting oneself from the female point of view therefore does not reflect a desire for opposition, but that of observing and interpreting the world from another perspective, from below and the gender perspective is the one that best allows us to expose the intertwining of relationships of domain.

Among white peoples, peoples of color, the poor, children, the elderly, the colonized and other human groups threatened by the destruction of the environment, it is those who belong to the female gender who face the greatest risks and suffer incomparably damage. greater than those who belong to the male gender (Warren, 2000: 2).

Domination over women is naturally at the heart of any feminist interpretation of domination, but it is also an illuminating and well-theorized model for any other form of domination as the oppressed are both feminized and naturalized (Plumwood, 1994: 73).

The patriarchal conceptual frameworks, which are also the theoretical presuppositions of modern science and philosophy, are characterized by hierarchy and oppositional dualisms: high/low, male/female, mind/body, culture/nature, reason/emotion, action/passivity, universal/particular, freedom/necessity, civilized/primitive, public/private, subject/object, where the first term is associated with men and is high, the second is associated with women and is devalued.

The list could go on for a long time; every distinction can be treated as dualism and become a real conceptual weapon constantly reworked and refined.

Val Plumwood focused on the nature of dualism in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Plumwood, 1993). Each dualism – writes the Australian philosopher – is connected to the others in such a way as to form a labyrinth of oppressive links linked by the logical structure characterized by exclusion and denial. In fact, dualism is not just a dichotomy or a hierarchy, which can be contingent and surmountable, but a way of thinking that makes equality and relationship unthinkable.

A dualism is a relationship of separation and domination characterized by a radical exclusion not open to change. Religion, philosophy, science, cultural symbols, social models, sexual norms, education, economics reflect this logic of domination which places the existence of men in the foreground, and pushes that of women to the fore. background, and conceives it as non-essential, with no purpose of its own (Ibid.: 41-59).

From the priority given to abstract thought, from Aristotle's sphere of freedom in the life of the polis as opposed to the sphere of necessity in the world of oikos, from the liberal distinction between public and private, the world of men was constructed in opposition to the world of nature and that of women. Being a man means dissociating oneself from the feminine and from what it represents: weakness, care, inclusion.

Masculinity can be achieved through opposition to the concrete world of everyday life, escaping from contact with the female world of the home towards the male world of politics or public life. This two-world experience lies at the heart of oppositional dualisms. Dualism arises from the denial of dependence on a subordinate 'other'.

In order for the image of the superior, active, autonomous man, creator of culture and technology to emerge, it was necessary to obscure and devalue the feminine and this paradigm was used to strengthen criminal organizations that are based on patriarchy, on gender stereotypes and female subordination.

Only by separating culture from nature could the patriarchal order of self-sufficient man who creates himself emerge, a symbolic order based on violence against differences translated into inferiority.

The foundational violence with deadly outcomes, in fact, is the universalization and absolute claim of only one of the two sexes of the human race, which bases civilization and the political order on itself and begins to displace all differences from its centrality, especially including sexual difference.

This dynamic, this model, runs through the whole of Western culture (Cavarero, 2007: 40-41).

Ecofeminism, on the contrary, by placing the emphasis on the interconnection of all forms of life, offers an ethical theory based not on separation or abstract individualism, but on the values of inclusion, relationships, the enhancement of conservation, of life and motherhood, starting from the awareness of the vulnerability of each one.

The recurring image in ecofeminist literature is that of weaving and spinning and the ethics inspired by it have been defined as a "quilt in the making",

a process similar to patchwork, composed of scraps offered by people living in different socio-economic, cultural and historical conditions [...]. The design that will emerge will depend on the life experiences, ethical issues and specific socio-economic and historical contexts of those who work there (Warren, 2000: 66-68).

Ecofeminist ethics is primarily based on empathy, the ability to feel and listen.

Perceiving each 'I' moment by moment as the provisional center of condensation of a network of interdependencies refers to the ideas of process, change, becoming: certainly not of stability and order to be preserved. [...] On the one hand, there is therefore a way to be clearly antagonistic to the existing; on the other hand, the attempt to ensure that different subjectivities all find space to express themselves (Donini, 1990: 239).

It starts from bodily experiences related to motherhood and understands the body as a source of knowledge, not as pure biology. It is not possible, in fact, to separate the ability to give life from women and their body, that body which has been robbed of its cultural, human and spiritual dimensions and which is manipulated, tortured and commodified. Recognizing that bodily experiences place women in relation to nature differently than men, the various authors have highlighted a different way of knowing, learning and feeling.

Feeling the interrelation with living beings and nature requires intense attention to the reality of the other, requires strength of concentration and judgment, the ability to grasp the experiences of others. Ecofeminist ethics is an emotional and intellectual practice, an ethic of compassion that includes all living beings (Donovan, 1996).

In outlining the transition from a society dominated by the symbolic order of death to one oriented towards life, from a linear and fragmented, abstract way of thinking, dominated by oppositions to a way of thinking that is respectful of subjectivity, of individuality; from a politics based on universalistic categories, to one that has to do with plurality and differences, ecofeminists have placed particular emphasis on the symbolic character of the maternal, or on what it represents: the gift, the care, the acceptance of the other as an unrepeatable singularity.

The maternal act of giving and nourishing, already a reference point of the Gandhian economy, it becomes a symbol and model of another economy, of another society in harmony with nature in which the sexual division of labor can be overcome.

As the economist Hilkka Pietilä wrote:

The world of nourishment and intimate human relationships constitutes the sphere in which basic human needs are anchored and in which models for human alternatives can be found. This world, which has been carried out mainly by women, already constitutes a cultural alternative, a source of ideas and values capable of pointing the way to an alternative development for nations and all humanity (Pietilä, 1986, quoted by Mellor, 1993: 18).

Ecofeminism then could be the way to deconstruct the patriarchal subculture that is the lifeblood of criminal organizations, as well as the way

to affirm democracy understood as an action aimed at guaranteeing the ‘foundations of human life’, an everyday life made of care and protection of life, friendship, solidarity, compassion.

The continuous and sudden transformations of the contemporary world constitute an important challenge for pedagogy, called to reflect and to envisage projects that focus on the person and his ontological relational dimension.

The commitment of pedagogy is to bring the person and his ability to care for the other, to custody of the common home, to teach the human, to the center of every change (Malavasi, 2020).

Teaching the human represents a design gaze, a research and training perspective to generate responsibilities and actions centered on a new educational pact, a green new deal that transforms entrepreneurial cultures and technological progress (Ibid.: 3).

As educators we are called to “reflect to develop interpretative keys and action strategies that can highlight the irreplaceable role of the culture of educational research as an engine of productive change” (Tomarchio & Olivieri, 2015: 1), going beyond mere theoretical reflection, assuming an active and effective position on the socio-educational problems that characterize the current historical-cultural context. Pedagogy becomes “militant” (*Ibidem*), goes beyond pure theory to act actively towards a rational transformation of situations, “it becomes a historical force to change social reality [...] it tries to give its contribution to the construction of a better, more civilized and more human world” (Baldacci, 2015: 13).

As Malavasi argues, the imperative is to work together to plan the future, for which the generations are co-responsible. Taking care of the ‘common home’, making a pact for peace and equity means calling into question a civil pedagogy, which identifies its foundation in the person and in the community (Malavasi, 2021). Taking care of people and communities implies addressing environmental issues, climate change, gender or identity inequalities in a determined way, so as to increase social, environmental and economic sustainability on several levels and through several means in the name of the development of solidarity one human family.

In these terms, democracy would become what Dewey hoped for, a way of life (Dewey, 1916), a process, like that of sowing and reaping, a path in which the path itself is the destination. Democracy would thus be a daily experience.

To experience democracy as a force capable of breaking down barriers, overcoming contradictions, transforming relations of domination and allowing the full expression of sociality, it is necessary for men and women to understand the value of difference and the importance of solidarity.

The future of a truly human community, free from the deadly action of criminal organizations, founded on connection, not on separation and opposition, requires in the first place that men, in order to preserve their

own humanity and dignity, want and know how to recognize and make their own the values of the support of life, change their way of thinking, of being in the world and in the relationship with women, reject violence, move away from a social conception of virility as power.

In an eco-pedagogical key (Pinto Minerva, 2017; Benetton, 2018; Strongoli, 2021), educational practices play a key and irreplaceable role in the promotion of human and humanizing culture, because eco-pedagogy as a whole combines human education and environmental protection for the protection of life, in an axiological framework capable of guiding the consolidation of a planetary citizenship (Iavarone *et al.*, 2017).

Only through a relational intelligence, capable of grasping relationships, going beyond opposing logics, is it possible to identify common elements in diversity (logic of the third party included, [Orefice, 2019]). All knowledge must therefore be contextualized and analyzed in its many dimensions, if we do not want to encourage the development of a blind intelligence incapable of “knowing the common fabric of things” (Morin, 2012: 140).

It is an education in fundamental thinking to open up to the epistemology of complexity (Morin, 1995, 2017), which stands in opposition to a simplifying, positivist and reductionist approach. There are postures of the mind which, more than others, allow us to open up to what surrounds us with a critical and also ethically oriented attitude. At the basis of thinking there is, in fact, the very essence of our existence. Without this activity, that creative and propulsive drive necessary for the flourishing of our civilization would stop (Mortari, 2008).

Indeed, the future that awaits us requires a mobile and flexible, migrant and erratic thought (Pinto Minerva, 2002), which represents its only chance of survival.

The education and training systems are called to recover the sense of their action which lies in the promotion of deep learning (Dozza, 2012), in the accompaniment of children and young people towards processes of construction and enhancement of personal identities through the preparation of contexts able to offer opportunities that allow to learn to learn and to form dispositions of mind able to direct one’s freedom of learning. As Nussbaum states

the real purpose of development is human development, it is people who count and the overall aim is to enable them to live a full and creative existence, developing their potential and organizing a meaningful life for themselves (Nussbaum, 2012: 175).

The focus is on physical, socio-emotional and cognitive well-being and on the relational, social and cultural contexts within which the child grows up and develops skills aimed at maintaining a good state of well-being.

Educational contexts must allow and promote the well-being and growth of boys and girls, in relationships with each other and with

adults. The ecological perspective clearly underlines how development is closely linked to their participation in cultural communities. Learning, autonomy, self-confidence come from the quality of relationships children experience with adults and other peers. Their well-being is closely linked to their acceptance and respect as a person in their social, cultural and personal differences.

Parents, educational services and the wider community must take care of all this, whose joint commitment can give rise to a real educational ecosystem oriented towards the promotion of healthy growth and the expansion of everyone's individual potential.

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