

# Book Reviews

## **ECOFEMINISM AND GLOBALIZATION: EXPLORING CULTURE, CONTEXT, AND RELIGION**

Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen  
Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003

REVIEWED BY KAREN KRUG

Although I have been anticipating the arrival of this book for a few days, at first I don't recognize it in my mailbox. I am surprised at how light and small the volume is. I had anticipated a larger book—perhaps because the topic of globalization is so grand. However, as I begin to read, I find the work is weighty. It is not offering fluff and uncritical new age spirituality. Rather, most articles deal with concrete realities and all the authors are self-reflective—identifying both the contributions and the limitations of different elements of, or types of, ecofeminism.

There is substance to this book, I know, because I am genuinely torn about whether to continue reading or to go snuggle with my two-year-old daughter who has just awakened and is chatting endearingly to her toys. It is only the most important of intellectual exercises that can so forcefully pull my attention away from my children these days. As I continue to read I find myself thinking how clear it is that I will continue my academic pursuits because these issues cannot be ignored. When I tear myself away and greet my daughters' morning smiles it is with the clear

reminder that I cannot wish a good life for them without working for a good life for those who have much less than they.

There is abundant evidence that the authors of this book are equally motivated to find ways to improve the living conditions in their immediate contexts and beyond these. In Section I, the introduction to major themes, Mary Mellor's chapter "Gender and the Environment" provides an insightful overview of the diverse strands of ecofeminism and of their theoretical underpinnings. Equally weighty is Noel Sturgeon's critical historical analysis of ecofeminism's impacts on the evolution of thought from "development" to "sustainable development" to "sustainable livelihoods." Sturgeon's analysis leads off the articles in the third and final section of the book—regional and transnational expressions of ecofeminism and responses to globalization—and the reason for its placement here is obvious. However, the book concludes rather abruptly with Greta Gaard's chapter on "Ecofeminism and the Greens" (disappointingly, one of over half those in the volume that were previously published in some form). This final paper diverges from the others in the third section of the book in that it and Sturgeon's are two of six not primarily dealing with spirituality and religion. With their focus on the United States, these more secular pieces are the bookends to four quite different chapters on ecofeminism and religious perspectives from Taiwan, Chile, Brazil, and Japan. All offer insights from their specific cultural contexts.

It is in the middle section, the three concrete cases dealing with

challenges to ecofeminism, that are the most significant in assessing how valuable ecofeminism is as a theoretical tool to overcome the negative forces of globalization. Wedged between the theoretical introductions and the less devastating criticisms in the final sections, the central concerns raised in the second section are buried in the rest of the book. Celia Nyamweru and Lois Ann Lorentzen both argue that women do not in fact have a special relationship with the land and the forest that leads them to preserve it. If it is not accurate to attribute the Chipko movement to ecofeminist forces, to indigenous women's essential and privileged connection to nature, then on what does ecofeminism stand? What are we to take from Lorentzen and Nyamweru's analyses if in this volume Aruna Gnanadason continues to cite the Chiptko movement as an example of ecofeminism in action? That the book allows us—or challenges us—to explore these contradictions, is an indication of its weightiness.

Nonetheless, I would like to have read a strong concluding chapter highlighting the important lessons, contradictions, and unresolved issues raised by the individual contributions and summarizing the conclusions about ecofeminism and globalization. Such a chapter might also include more explicit discussion of the meaning of globalization in each of the contexts. What are the ramifications of ecofeminism in the specific localities affected by globalization? If ecofeminism does not address globalization in concrete ways, is it a praxis that will move us in the direction co-editor Heather Eaton so powerfully challenges us to move?

Can ecofeminism really offer anything new, or is it merely a generic heading for the more meaningful and explicit analyses engendered by faithful and comprehensive criticism from established theoretical perspectives? I want to hear the editors' answers to their precise question: "Does ecofeminism make sense, and can it be effective in concrete, complex situations?"

## **TANGLED ROUTES: WOMEN, WORK AND GLOBALIZATION ON THE TOMATO TRAIL**

Deborah Barndt  
Aurora: Garamond Press, 2002

REVIEWED BY JAN KAINER

Inspired by the tomato as the central subject of her analysis of the North American food system, Deborah Barndt's book describes in vivid detail the intricate path of the commodified tomato from the agricultural fields of the South to the fast-food restaurant and supermarket of the North. As the story of the tomato unfolds, we are shown the complex interconnections between the environmental, economic and social processes that make up the transnational food chain. We learn about the ecological degradation of tomato "production," the position of working women in growing and selling the tomato under conditions of industry and labour market restructuring, and the interrelationship between production and consumption in the global food chain. From the growth of seedlings, to picking and sorting, to transporting tomatoes North to sell in hamburgers at McDonald's and on supermarket shelves in Loblaw's, Barndt shows us how globalization really operates. We are presented with

a coherent account of how the North American food system affects workers, the environment, the food we eat, our eating patterns, as well as broader economic developments such as the organization of transnational and regional economies in an era of trade liberalization.

Taking us back to pre-colonial times, we learn that the *tomatl* was grown by indigenous people, the Mayan and the Aztec, long before the days of Christ. Referred to as the "love apple," the tomato was eventually exported to Europe and incorporated into Italian and Spanish cuisine. The colonial period is for Barndt one "moment" among many in the historical processes that contributed to the political, economic, and ideological forces leading up to the present day genetically modified, corporate, global tomato. The other "moments" include the industrial moment under capitalism, the genetic moment and neo-liberalism, and the computer moment and globalization. By analyzing the tomato "across space and through time," the author explores the historical changes in agricultural "production" that emerged from pre-colonialism to the present.

By connecting the ecological with the social in chapter 2, Barndt uncovers blatant contradictions in the tomato food chain. While the tomato is abused ecologically by fertilizers, toxic pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides, in addition to being genetically modified, cosmetically the tomato is treated with the greatest of care. In preparation for the supermarket, tomatoes are washed in highly chlorinated water, blow-dried, waxed and polished. They are temperature controlled, weighed, inspected for pesticides and handled deftly by their packers. This tender treatment of the tomato contrasts sharply with the severe environmental conditions in which the fruit is grown, but more importantly, it diverges completely with the harsh labour conditions of peasants working in the agricultural fields of Mexico or those of fast-food and supermarket

workers in Canada. Barndt elaborates on the life and work of these employees in chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6. Each chapter is a case study profiling a different link on the tomato trail.

Beginning with the "consumption end" of the food chain Barndt analyses the fast-food experience of consumers and workers at McDonald's. This transnational company is a powerful symbol of everything that is negative about economic globalization. McDonald's epitomizes American cultural hegemony of consumerism and typifies common cultural experiences of food consumption in which "food is more symbolic and cultural than material and physical." Moreover, McDonald's managerial practices that emphasize efficiency, rationality and labour flexibility have come to dominate corporate thinking worldwide. Both McDonald's and Loblaw's rely on feminized, and youthful, flexible labour to meet intermittent customer demand. Barndt's interviews with food workers reveal a drastic change in eating patterns—instead of family meal times, food is eaten on the run to accommodate shifting work schedules and erratic social lives, a pattern that reinforces fast-food consumption.

After discussing corporate food consumption in the North, Barndt moves to an analysis of the migrant workers involved in the transportation and harvest of tomatoes in the South. A fluid picture of migrant workers crossing borders to seek employment immediately emerges. Truck driver, Humberto, and agricultural picker, Irena, spend long periods away from their home in Mexico travelling North to Canada to work. Agricultural companies are also on the move seeking low-wage, flexible labour and a "sunflower" climate ideal for growing food. Like corporate food companies in the North, agribusinesses locate in Mexico to take advantage of flexible feminine labour, but this time indigenous women with children are housed in deplorable conditions and