

WOMEN AND BIOS

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I would first like to refer to the paper which I presented at the First Biopolitics International Conference 1987 in Athens.¹ At that time I referred to the basic dualism of western culture which implies that women and nature are more closely connected than men and nature. I referred also to the culture of women as an untapped source of skill, vision and values which will be needed to create a sustainable development in the future.

With concern to dualism and the separation in the classical sense, women have strongly expressed the need for suspending such dualistic thinking. It does not mean, however, that we are opposing the closer relationship with nature. Many of us would rather like to enhance and develop this relationship even further and renew it, if it has deteriorated. Men, in particular, should develop a closer relationship with nature than the one they have in our culture today. They are natural beings, as well as women, and should stop denying or ignoring this. Women could assist men in liberating themselves from this classical dualism between body and mind, nature and man, if they would only be willing to listen.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The concept of sustainable development has recently become a very fashionable one due to the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future,² which is popularly called the Brundtland Report, headed by its Chairman, Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway. As an idea and concept, sustainable development has been discussed for many years by environmentalists and people in alternative movements. Due to this report, it has now finally become fashionable.

Sustainable development means development which is ecologically sane, i.e. "in harmony with the terms of living nature." It is the only kind of development which will suffice in the long run.

However, the Brundtland Report does not make it clear just what sustainable development is or what is required. At the same time, the report speaks about continuous economic growth everywhere, in both rich and poor countries. This is simply contradictory and mutually exclusive. Either we adjust our economic growth and production to the potential of global resources or we perish. With the situation in the world today we must put a halt to material growth, which to a great extent implies waste and destruction in the rich, "over-developed" countries, in order to allow the developing countries to grow.

I am very disappointed with this report. It is extremely watered-down, compromising and does not give a clear view of the situation in the world today. The report does not say unambiguously that drastic measures are necessary. It only gives an authoritative excuse for those who would like to neglect or postpone measures, which should have been taken long ago.

In Finland we have a very prominent National Committee to study the report and to draw conclusions. I am a member of this committee. We have been able to recognize that in many situations, we should actually withdraw some legislation and measures concerning the protection of the environment, if we were to follow the recommendations of the Brundtland Commission. Finnish legislation in these matters is not at all progressive, which unfortunately, says something about the quality of the report.

The report also fails to take women's perspective into consideration, in spite of having had a female chairman and two other women members. There were three women among 21 members. It appears as if these women, once again, became "male" politicians and did not have a woman's view, or were overruled by a male majority.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

I now come to the subject of this session - international cooperation - and in particular, with regard to the United Nations as the central organization. What is occurring in the United Nations today in relation to women and bios, and biopolitics?

The United Nations unanimously adopted a comprehensive program called the "Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women Towards the Year 2000" at the World Conference in Nairobi 1985.³ Recently, a system-wide medium term plan has been prepared advising how to properly implement the strategies in the entire United Nations system, in all its agencies and organizations. However, there are only a few paragraphs in the Nairobi Strategies on the environment. Even if western culture has classically connected women and nature, the

United Nations is failing to see any connection.

In 1984 the United Nations also produced a very important report entitled "World Survey on the Role of Women in Development",⁴ where for the first time in history, development was assessed from a woman's point of view. The survey makes it clear how closely, in developing countries, a woman's situation and work are related to the availability and safety of water; the preservation of multi-purpose forestry; and the preservation of soil and its fertility. In the North the issues are acid rain killing the forests and poisoning the soil, the destruction of the ozone layer and poisonous gases in the atmosphere, all of which constitute health risks, particularly to children. Other concerns are the dying lakes and heavy metal residues spreading over the environment and food supplies. To end all this, and avoid future reoccurrences implies a completely different mode of production technology in both industry and agriculture, as well as other forms of traffic and transportation arrangements. All this gives justification to the fact that as stated in many ways in the World Survey, development will become more humane and responsive to real human needs, if it is shaped according to the needs and desires of women. At the same time, it will become ecologically sane.

The theme of this conference is Bios in the Next Millennium. I would like to propose that we first look to the next decade. We should do our homework and define what sustainable development really means, and what it requires from each country. We must try to influence the politics and development in our respective countries through all possible means.

A very important process is due to begin in the United Nations this autumn - the preparation of the Third International Development Strategy for the fourth United Nations Development Decade, covering the 1990s (there was no particular strategy for the 1960s). In preparing this strategy now, both women and bios should be very much in focus since they are interrelated.

There are many of us here who are active in the United Nations Association in our own countries. For us it is a special task to try to ensure that both the Nairobi Strategies and the Environment Perspectives are incorporated in the Third International Development Strategy for the 1990s. This strategy will be adopted in the United Nations General Assembly in 1990 and will then become a leading development strategy for the whole world during the last decade of this century. This is one concrete task for us in the United Nations Association to complete in the next couple of years.

I would like to close by stating that biopolitics is "future politics". It should be the international development strategy of the United Nations for the 1990s.

REFERENCES

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Hilikka M. Pietila received her M.Sc. in Nutrition, from the University of Helsinki. She has been a member of the Executive Committee of WFUNA, a member of the Finnish National Commission for UNESCO, the International Foundation for Development Alternatives Council, the Association of Home Economists in Finland and is now vice-President of WFUNA. She has published articles in a great number of international conferences and for her feminist ideas and activities.