

ANIMA

A transversal concept

In this first part, I gathered the words of women of my generation, defined as Generation "X", whose sincerity and convictions I can attest to. Usually, documentary filmmakers present animism in the darkness of the sacred woods through voodoo ceremonies, preferably at night... People murmuring, whispering, outside of the so-called "civilized" world. A typical condescending ethnologist's gaze often applies to these themes. Here, on the other hand, the interviewees speak in the light of day, with a smile and even an element of humor - right in the middle of modernity. They articulate their thinking, their philosophy, with full awareness of contemporary issues, seeking solutions for today's ills. We are quite far, for the moment, from "sacred woods" and voodoo ceremonies, though we are destined to return to it. But we will only get there with the respect due to those who have kept alive a certain way of thinking and living, an approach that could well be life-saving. The way they understand the place of the human being in the universe is at the same time humble yet aware of its importance. For everything is connected.

The purpose of the following text is to briefly retrace history, the process of eradicating these ancient sciences and belittling the feminine gender, which, it seems to me, has led us to the complete imbalance in which we are currently struggling.

"If you don't know where you are going, look to where you've come from"

West African Proverb

Faced with a pandemic generated by the COVID-19 virus, humanity is in panic. There is an urgent need to question and acknowledge the violence that humans have exerted on the environment during the Anthropocene Epoch – to the point of committing Ecocide, accelerating climate change, and producing a dysfunctional and unequal society. We need to understand and deconstruct the mechanisms that the capitalist system employs to shape our minds. Do we still accept the superiority of Western "modernity" while at the same time witnessing the state of the world we find ourselves in today?

As we realize that the long-term survival of humanity is threatened, isn't it also time to realize the need to decolonize our minds?

Where are the places, the niches, the in-betweens of this world that escaped the colonial propaganda whose objective was to reduce non-monotheistic and non-Western peoples to the rank of "savages" or "pagans"?

If to be savage is to be close to nature, and to be pagan, to worship it, how does that justify so much killing and obliteration? In the colonizer's view, it exactly this relationship with nature that threatens its social order, an order that modernity continues to support today. To liberate our minds from the colonial worldview is to reclaim what it stripped from humanity, to redefine and reconstruct our relationship with nature.

The deconstruction of prejudices is necessary in order to build a sustainable future. This is the desire and the objective of my research. We cannot remake history, erasing the errors of the past, but we are capable of reflecting and searching for what has been erased, that which survives in the cracks, leaving aside the colonial worldview in which we were educated.

The film and book project, entitled Anima, of which I present here the first part, aims to highlight the sustenance of animist precepts and philosophies. These, throughout the world, have, among other common points, to place femininity at the center of the original creation, and to consider women as a privileged spiritual vector. This was questioned, even eradicated, by the patriarchy - and then by colonialism.

The origin of the imbalance

The world as some people knew it was turned upside down at the beginning of the 15th century, when some European governments, supported by undeniable papal power, decided to appropriate lands and territories that they deemed "discovered" when they were simply unknown to them. At that time, these same people believed that the Earth was flat. The Catholic Inquisition furiously massacred "heretics" and "witches" in public squares. In the same vein, the savages, the barbarians, considered as soul-less, were, in their eyes, the others that gave them the "de facto" right to appropriate their property. Some of these "savages" had already traveled to land far beyond the territories they knew, without attempting to conquering it. The religious crusades served as a justification for the conquest of new territories; Catholicism was imposed by force of arms and reinforced by carefully targeted education. Resistance lasted for centuries. The Western conquest was not without its

difficulties. A very long and violent period of slavery by the Arabs, especially during their religious expansion on the African continent, preceded and then worked concomitantly with the Western trade. The main differences between the Western European slave trade and slavery as practiced by the Arabs were first of all the selection of humans on the basis of ethnic criteria. For the Arabs, any human captured was a slave, even a Westerner - like Miguel Cervantes, for example, the author of Don Quixote. Secondly, the export of slaves from one continent to another, the excessive profitability, the industrial side of this exploitation, of this iniquitous trade, was a peculiarity of the western trade. Locally in West Africa, slavery already existed in a traditional way, in a completely different way. For example, in Senegal, "jaams" (often translated as "slaves") were prisoners, or descendants of prisoners of war, who worked for royalty and the community. In exchange, they were well-treated and had the opportunity to climb the social ladder, to "rise in rank."

Thus, whether it was the Catholics during the Crusades or the Muslims during their conquest, each party showed great violence towards the indigenous people in the name of a God who was supposed to be and to bring Love and Peace. For more than five centuries, the monotheistic religions have served as a pretext for wars whose economic motivations are well known, and as arguments for propaganda aimed at demeaning, degrading and demonizing the indigenous cultures that preceded them. Especially women, "sacrificed on the altar of God," as the Egyptian author Nawal el Saadawi wrote. They were faced with one another, their blood sanctifying the spaces where their dogmas were spread.

Colonization radically destructured entire societies. Imposed its own patriarchal values, religions, political and social systems, whereas in pre-colonial societies, matriarchy as a social, economic, political and spiritual organization dominated.

By depriving the feminine half of humanity of the respect that it is rightly due, by denying it the importance it once had, have we not finally created the global imbalance that we now witness at all levels?

Animism and Social Ecology

And yet... the underestimated spiritualities of these indigenous peoples have persisted all over the planet. They have in common a way of perceiving the link between human beings and their environment, with Nature, in consciousness and respect, in search of a reciprocal and vital harmony. Social organization is influenced by this relationship, which leads to a more egalitarian community structure, as some libertarian and anarchist anthropologists show . It is a healthy way of life, fiercely preserved by certain peoples whose lives are endangered.

The Amazon rainforest and other primary forests are burning, victims of land grabbers and developers, amputated of their trees, medicinal plants, and the protection of the people who inhabit them. Greenland's igloos are disappearing, icebergs are melting, and polar bears are drowning.

Long before the declaration of human rights in the West, the so-called "pagan" peoples had decreed their rules of life, like the Mandé by the Mandén Charter (1236 - West Africa), proclaimed by Soundiata Keita, Emperor of Mali, stating in the preamble: "A life is a life; one life is not older or more respectable than another, just as one life is not superior to another " . In South Africa, and extended to the Bantu population (Central Africa), the ancestral Ubuntu philosophy can be summarized as follows: "I am what I am because of what we all are".

Thus, **everything that is alive deserves respect**. The ideas of interdependence and equality of life can be found in all so-called "animist" philosophies and spiritual traditions throughout the world. In spite of the yoke of colonization, in some regions forms of syncretism or neo-paganism are developing. They share common views on the equality of all the living and spiritual communication with the natural elements and spirits of the dead. Here humans are seen as part of a larger universe, fed by and in perpetual interaction with all vibrations.

These traditions are not publicly acknowledged. They are often hidden, considered almost shameful. To speak of what I know, it is the same thing in Ivory Coast, where Christianity prevails. Ancestor fetishes are the first thing the Church asks its faithful to reject and be purified of. Some are aware that this entails losing part of their strength, but what wouldn't one do to "look like Westerners"! This is all the more so convincing if one considers that these fetishes have not protected Africa from the disasters that have befallen its people. The

inferiority complex insidiously as much as violently imposed by the colonists still has terrible consequences today, as in the time of Frantz Fanon, when he wrote "The Wretched of the Earth" in 1961.

What we urgently need to understand is that indigenous philosophies are sciences unrecognized, delegitimized, yet existing. They are part of a legacy that may well save humanity from the nightmares predicted by George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and Margaret Atwood (respective authors of "1984", "Le Meilleur des Mondes" and "The Handmaid's tale").

Let's go back to the origins...

Colonized Feminine Spirituality

In terms of societal structure, until the 18th century, there were mainly "matriarchates", as the Senegalese scientist and historian Cheikh Anta Diop points out: "Matriarchy preceded patriarchy in the gathering and hunting societies, then in those of livestock with the 'Mother Goddess'. This system would be based on the importance accorded to the feminine, the woman embodying the reproduction of the species and its hope of perpetuation in a circular and cyclical temporal dimension where the myth of the "eternal return" is born.

” The management of the community was rather entrusted to women, also for spiritual reasons. One of the oldest and most widespread animist cults on the planet is that of the Mother Goddess (Gaia, for example, in some cultures). In order for the patriarchy to extend its power, and to install capitalism, which exploits resources and men without limits, it was necessary to remove both power and spirituality from the benevolent female entity, be it Goddess or human.

Eco-feminism is a philosophy, a political tradition and a social movement that highlights the direct link between the exploitation of women and the exploitation of nature. One of its co-founders, since the 1980s, Starhawk, leader of WICA (a neo-Pagan movement whose name comes from an Old English term translated as wisdom or witchcraft) - defines the practice of witchcraft and the worship of the Mother Goddess as "a means of renewing the bonds that have been broken by the privatization of land, the destruction of communities and their means of subsistence, and the rise of an oppressive and aggressive relationship with nature " .

Indeed, in a strangely parallel manner, the patriarchy has nibbled away at this power, and the deities have been masculinized, to the point that monotheism imposes an exclusively masculine deity. In an oversimplified way, one could say that patriarchy served capitalism (and vice versa), and that capitalism engendered a process of industrialization in the colonies that led to the exploitation of natural resources to the point of exhaustion. In order to appropriate them, a gender and civilizational struggle was waged concomitantly, to the detriment of women. Its culmination was the Inquisition and the witch hunt, their horrors and motivations, and the extermination of indigenous peoples and their cultures, especially the Amerindians. Africa was ravaged for four centuries by the slave trade, which brought enormous profits to Western nation-states and created the basis for their current power. The intimate link between sexual and racial exploitation, capitalism, and colonization was firmly woven. Since then, although officially abolished, slavery continues to exist. Women rebelled, fought and regained their rights little by little, but they never regained the power and respect they once had, politically and spiritually. Human activity has become toxic to the planet. Proof of this is the "Earth Overshoot Day", when annual consumption exceeds Earth's capacity to reproduce natural resources. This figure has slightly decreased following the almost global confinement of 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This state of affairs is only the result of consumption habits, a lifestyle adopted by almost the entire world population. This way of life, which is detrimental to Nature and marked by inequalities of all kinds, has been made possible, it seems to me, in part due to the violent separation of women from the spheres of power, their roles and abilities devalued by religions, as well as from their pre-colonial cultures.

Without attributing to women unalterable good intentions, a fallacious cliché, it seems that (given what we know about matriarchal societies) women are more inclined to manage economic and political issues in a spirit of preservation of life, human or otherwise.

Indigenous peoples who have escaped the colonial steamroller have always had a respectful and harmonious relationship with nature. They too have been decimated, stifled, and threatened in every nook and cranny. In defiance of these buried wisdoms, we must recognize that it was mostly white men who dug the pit that awaits us - if we do not react.

Women's Voice for a Better Future

"The mothers who remained in the tent refused to be impressed by this show of force and none of them ran away. On the contrary, some of them made an incredibly courageous gesture: they lifted their corsages or undressed, showing their bare breasts to the police, which in our culture is a curse. ”

Wangary Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist, does not speak here of FEMEN, but of an ancestral African tradition of protest. Even today, violence and inequality against women is a global problem. The #MeToo movement of 2019 has only shown the tip of the iceberg. The word "femicide" was invented to describe all crimes committed with the sole motive of the victim's gender!

"Feminism is humanism" - Simone de Beauvoir.

We are talking about half of humanity. While the resumption of power by women must make growing global challenge to patriarchy, the collective consciousness seems to be paying more attention to ecology and gender-based violence ... as the ecological and social situation takes an apocalyptic turn. We see the harms of drug medicines, the power of big pharma, the manipulation of our minds to make us addicts. Suddenly, some turn to the indigenous peoples who are also struggling for the survival of their cultures and sciences. More and more people are turning to natural medicine (homeopathy, herbalism, etc.) and traditional healers. Something very important has been trampled by colonization: our intimate and vital link with the Earth in a benevolent interaction. If we take care of our planet, the elements that make it up will take care of us in a very concrete way. We must therefore hope for a brighter future and review certain parameters that block our vision and lock us in the prison of capital, profit, and unlimited "progress" that neglects human beings, our relationship to the Earth, and the inequalities on which this economic system is based, including those suffered by the female gender.

"It is impossible, in a market system, not to devastate the planet. It is now up to women to take up the human voice again."

Françoise d'Eaubonne, co-founder of Ecofeminism, 1960 .

Faced with the state of our world, it is time to listen to women. We will thus weave together, in a spirit of dialogue and listening, combining film and writing, emotions and reflections, Art and History, a common learning of what it means to be alive, and consciously rebuild Harmony, in cultivating Peace. This is a necessary effort in the hope for a better, and the only, future for our species.

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