

Report of webinar in PIMA's Climate Justice and ALE Series, held on 13 October 2021
Ecofeminism makes sense: towards life-affirming adult learning and education (ALE)

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“A single ecological community is the only solution” – this is the message Jacklyn Cock left participants with, at the end of a vibrant, well attended webinar.

The webinar is part of PIMA's Climate Justice and ALE webinar series, which was co-hosted with Adult Learning Australia (ALA), Canadian Association for Studies in Adult Education (CASAE) and Standing Conference on University Teaching and Research in Education of Adults (SCUTREA). There were close to 100 registrants with 50 attending. The two speakers were Jacklyn Cock, Professor Emerita in the Department of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, where she is also Research Professor in the Sociology of Work Unit (SWOP); and Serap Brown, a Turkish/Canadian poet, film-maker, adult educator, and PhD student who is using ecofeminism and decolonization in her praxis.

Jacklyn drew on participatory action research on the lived experience of coal-affected communities. She suggests that many black working-class women living in such communities in contemporary South Africa are expressing in their actions and practices an eco-feminism that is a form of resistance to social and environmental injustice. While not claiming eco-feminism as an identity, these women are providing a unifying narrative in the form of an African eco-feminism, but at enormous cost to themselves as violence to anti-coal activists, who are predominantly women, is increasing. (Here is a link to a related chapter which makes compelling reading: <https://www.swop.org.za/post/our-existence-is-resistance-women-and-the-challenge-of-the-climate-crisis-and-covid-19-pandemic>)

Her presentation covered four aspects: firstly, that eco-feminism can provide us with a new political imaginary. It can be a conceptual tool to cut through the frozen imaginaries of people who cannot envisage an alternative to our world with its savage inequalities and environmental destruction. Secondly, this alternative world requires a different understanding of nature, an understanding that involves the decolonization of the present dominant practices and understanding of nature and instead emphasizes the interconnectedness of all life forms. Thirdly, that eco-feminism involves practising solidarity and fourthly, that it means massive, systemic change.

Jacklyn offered an overview of various forms of ecofeminism defined by solidarity with other women, a way of life, a way of practicing commitment to collective action for a just transition. Critical of the elitism of liberal feminism, she highlighted the importance of class and a commitment to socialist ecofeminism, in order to replace a society built on profit, rather than with the satisfaction of human needs. However, she warned that using ideological labels may lead to undermining solidarity – labels can be used negatively or inspirationally. She reminded us to ‘live simply so that others can simply live’, and emphasized the importance of ‘mutual sharing and support, instead of the possessive, consumerist, competitive individualism of neo-liberal capitalism.’

Serap Brown's presentation was entitled 'In search of a new paradigm: water as my teacher'. She utilized experiences of her quest to build a new relationship with water as part of the shift from a 'separation paradigm', which carries the techno-industrial values of Western Eurocentric culture, towards the 'relationality paradigm'. She shared a film that she has made *I am River*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWa5kfgx3dQ>, and poetry to demonstrate different ways of challenging the binary dualism of human/nature division.

Serap spoke to some of the many ways of integrating ecofeminist principles into life affirming adult education: utilising the arts with creativity and authenticity; creating dialogical spaces; story-telling; learning from oral stories of people and the land; conducting outdoor and experiential environmental education programs; collaboratively creating wild pedagogies; opening space to voice and listening, including the voice of nature, amongst others.

With the juxta positioning of the different contexts of harsh working class, impoverished communities on the coal mines in South Africa, and the relatively empty natural landscapes of Canada, the scene was set for very rich conversations as to how, within different contexts, we address the dualisms of the contemporary period; in particular, how do we develop a new understanding and relationship to Nature? How do we move towards a single ecological community?

This report cannot do justice to the rich, provocative, and stimulating dialogue; therefore, we encourage you to listen to the recording of the webinar at:

<https://dl.dropbox.com/s/cdbtx4sk2i9sstc/EcofeminismWebinar.mp4>

We end with the first part of a poem by *Serap Brown*:

Becoming and Being

I did not become an ecofeminist

I just am.

I have realized, I just am, because...

And I did not become an environmentalist.

I did not become a feminist

I just am. How could I not be?

I just am. How could I not be?

Witnessed crystal clear, running waters

Witnessed women who

Turn grey, heavy, thick and dull.

were oppressed

Witnessed legendary ancient forests,

silenced

holding wisdom,

erased from history

huge giant trees,

made invisible,

eradicated, cleared.

who could not

Forests in relations, home to many

practise their will,

birds, wolves, fish, and water.

and become fully human.

Witnessed life slowly and painfully

I did not have a choice to become a feminist.

disappearing from the land.

My loved ones have been fading away.

I just am. (continued)

I did not have a choice to become an environmentalist.