

BOOK

Our Mother Ocean: Enclosure, Commons, and the Global Fishermen's Movement

Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Monica Chilese;
translated by Silvia Federici; Common Notions; NY. 2014

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Our *Mother Ocean*, co-authored by renowned feminist political theorist Mariarosa Dalla Costa and sociologist Monica Chilese, is a vigorous critique of where globalization and industrialization in fishing have led global water resources to, and the direct role that humankind has played in this destructive relationship.

Oceans are more than mere masses of water. We depend on them for oxygen, for climate control, and for a significant portion of our food resources. Since ancient times, oceans have also been a means for travel, to discover the world, to 'globalize' humankind. Today, the same oceans are the sites of some of the worst man-made disasters on earth—the BP oil spill off the Gulf of Mexico; the Fukushima nuclear disaster, or the ecological catastrophes caused by the repeated tsunamis threatening large parts of coastal communities.

This book is important in bringing into sharp focus the current war over oceanic resources and the possibility of resistance to the irrational exploitation and depletion of "this great reservoir of nature". Reviewing the more than two decades that have elapsed since the Rio Conference, Dalla Costa describes the various agreements and conventions to safeguard the oceans and preserve the rights of those traditionally dependent on the oceans, and how they all failed to deliver what they promised.

The industrialization of the fishing sector carried on, pushed through, as Dalla Costa finds out, with the help of USD 20 billion annually. These subsidies were primarily devoted to new technology, leading to overfishing and a host of other problems.

Co-author Monica Chilese talks of how excessive fishing has led to the collapse of 40 of the 60 main stocks of fish in North Atlantic. Unregulated forms of fishing like use of explosives had put 85 per cent of the coral barriers at risk in Indonesia. Industrial aquaculture, in the push for greater productivity and profits, used increasing quantities of chemicals and drugs, poisoning consumers and polluting the environment. Dalla Costa



points to Indian women and children working in aquaculture farms—"blue factories"—for eight to ten hours each day, in unhygienic conditions. The authors describe how industrial fishing was fast replacing good jobs in traditional fishing with the alienated, high work intensity techniques of industry.

Globalization is presently spreading the scourge of overfishing across the world. The authors quote the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) as saying: "...developing countries with good fishing stock have stipulated fishing agreements with foreign countries... [for the] influx of foreign currency with which to pay off debts and stimulate economic growth. Unless rigorous protection mechanisms are activated this can be a dangerous mistake."

Simultaneously, the authors outline a parallel narrative, centred in the global South that has brought together movements of fisherpeople over the question of food sovereignty, and seeks to make the organic connection between modes of fishing and safeguarding the ecosystem. Dalla Costa, in tracing the movement, dwells extensively on the formation of the National Fishworkers Forum (NFF) in India. She sees the accumulation of autonomous struggles of fisherpeople into national formations leading on to the World Forum of Fish Harvests and Fish Workers in 1997, and the World Forum of Fisher Peoples in 2000. To quote Tom Kocherry, the President of the NFF from 1982 to 1995, "...fishermen in the North and the South, all victims of globalization, are trying a new development paradigm ... where small is acceptable as beautiful and sustainable, and simplicity becomes a way of life, paying due respect to indigenous cultures."

This is an important reader to understand the connections between globalized industrialization and the destruction of our oceans and water resources. The book simultaneously puts out the hope of struggles from below that play David against the might of the industrial Goliath. The India-centric exploration of resistance does not detract from showing the global nature of the resistance. The book, however, while talking of the dehumanizing condition of wage labour in industrial fishing, does not include in its exploration of resistance, either an analysis of the attempts that have been made to organize industrial fishworkers, or the importance of such organization in the fight for regulation of industrial fishing. ❏



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Writers and potential contributors to YEMAYA, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women

and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

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