

The Ecopsychology of Milk

By Odette Springer

Slogans such as the “the war on drugs,” “the war on terror,” and most recently, “the war on women” ignite potent myths that sway our thought processes, whether to the right or left of the political stratum. Yet, when waging a “war” threatens the destruction of the socio-economic status quo, as does the grassroots attempt to allow the sale of unpasteurized milk, it seems to remain voiceless in the mainstream media. By viewing this issue ecopsychologically, I argue that like war, but more insidious and poisonous than weaponry and drones, the systemic chemical destruction of our food supply by agribusiness threatens our survival and the survival of our planet.

The above issues are very near and dear to me: I worked for seven years at a Los Angeles food co-op that was raided in August, 2011, by the FDA and shut down for selling raw milk produced by a farmer we personally knew. Food co-ops across the country are being systematically put out of business by the FDA for selling raw dairy products, yet in 2003, the USDA/FDA reported deli meats caused 515 times more illness from listeria than raw milk, and pasteurized milk caused 29 times more illness from listeria than raw milk (“Interpretive Summary” 17). This caused me to rethink how we relate to food and to consider how disconnected we are from the soul of Mother-Matter-matter. When we treat the cow harshly and turn her bounty into a product for mass production, we, too, become packaged souls on life’s assembly line.

In addition to healing interpersonal alienation, ecopsychology endeavors to repair the more original estrangement between individuals and nature. Part of ecopsychology’s goal is to revive and re-feminize the *anima mundi*—the World Soul—which has been

suppressed for millennia, but which embodies all that is feminine. Traditionally female traits had formerly been expressed as images—archetypal Earth Goddesses—until Plato intellectualized the concept, allowing Great Mother to keep her femininity while turning her into an abstract idea. As a result, in Plato’s “urbane metaphysical theories” of *anima mundi*, “[o]ne must look closely to find any recognizable trace of the voluptuous old Earth Mother (*Voice of the Earth* 139). However, thanks to ecopsychology, the *anima mundi* has been resurrected as the archetypal realm of the collective unconscious, in which the Great Mother Gaia reigns supreme, if only one knows how and where to find her.

Long associated with the Great Mother goddesses as providers of nourishment, cows symbolize the sacredness of bringing forth food from the earth in order to feed our offspring. Egypt’s fertility-cow goddess, Hathor, was a deification of the Milky Way, which was compared to a pool of cow’s milk. Hathor’s ancient Greek counterpart, Hera—an aspect of Gaia—seems to have functioned similarly. As Jean Shinoda Bolen suggests, “this became part of Hera’s mythology: when milk spurted from her breasts, the Milky Way was formed. The drops that fell to the ground became lilies, flowers symbolizing another pre-Hellenic belief in the self-fertilizing power of the female genitals” (139). Milk is also a metaphor for abundance and universal sustenance, as symbolized by the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi, who rose out of an Ocean of Milk. It is said that a cow called Kamadhenu, with enough milk to feed the world for all eternity, came with her. Images of the foamy, white substance of the infinite ocean are further illustrated by French historian Jules Michelet as the mother’s breast swollen with milk: “[W]ith its assiduous caresses, rounding the bank, [the sea] gave it a maternal form, and I was going

to say the visible tenderness of a woman's breast, what the child finds so pleasant—refuge, warmth and repose" (qtd. in Bachelard 118). Milk represents our first sanctioned pleasure and positive experience of life. While in India cows are considered sacred and embody the Mother Archetype, we westerners commoditize "cash" cows for the benefit of the Dairy Industry.

This war on food began with the industrial revolution, which changed society from an agricultural economy to one of industry and commerce. In addition to food, clothes, cars, and basic necessities became mass-produced on assembly lines. As a result of mechanization, and later, standardization, artisans, along with their specialties and craftsmanship, became obsolete. Unfortunately, when machines replaced humans, the link between humans and their nurturing Mother-Mater-matter was broken. By severing contact with the earth, the feminine, intuitive, contemplative energy disembodied. C. G. Jung stressed the urgency of healing this chasm: "We forget that first of all we should establish connection between the higher and lower regions of our psyche. Such a connection exists in Eastern [cultures], while we are cut off from our earth through more than a thousand years of Christian training" (124). Jung speaks of the power of the internalized, integrated life known in Eastern traditions, which I witnessed firsthand when I was introduced several years ago to a master of the esoteric style of jujitsu, who trained under the guidance of a reclusive Zen master in the mountains of Japan and practiced a system of embodied yoga called "formless form." Although I had been practicing yoga since I was eighteen, I had never seen "raw energy" move through a body, as if being possessed by an animal. His movements were never rushed, and his breath formed what looked like ripples of water in the *tanden*, the abdominal spiritual

center where the life force—what the Japanese refer to as *ki*, and the Hindus and Buddhists call *prana*—resides. He told me then if one rushes, one cannot feel the movement of the breath, which he likened to water. In this state of complete relaxation, he was at his most powerful.

Yet sadly, even the Eastern religious traditions of Japan and India, which once nurtured the soul, have also fallen prey to an unquenchable greed for power and control that has destroyed much of its spiritual society, especially in urban culture. Only a few traditions exist today that still consider germane the divine as the source and support of life on earth. In addition to jujitsu, one of these is the sacred tradition of Vodun, commonly referred to as Voodoo, which is “a force that exists above and beyond everything, that is unknowable, and upon which everything that exists depends,” according to Gabien Djimassé (8). In fact, humans “are nothing but the products of that force which is transmitted through breath” (8). What is being suggested here is the life force, which cannot be seen or known in and of itself, but which can be experienced through the activity of breathing. Without connection to our most essential breath, modern westerners often feel detached from their bodies and consequently, from their instincts. It is perhaps our breathless disconnection from our internal nature that seems to make a symbiotic, constructive relationship with technology impossible, allowing humankind to believe that instead of working in partnership with machines, he or she can conquer them and subsequently, his or her world. This Promethean attitude towards our environment will potentially erode our wellspring of sustenance and supply.

Consequently, the primary resource of our physical nourishment—food—has become processed, pasteurized, packaged. Driven by maximization of profit, corporations

have polluted our food chain. As Dennis Slattery points out, “the original meaning of the term ‘pollution’ derives from the Latin *pollure*, meaning ‘to defile.’ But it is also linked to *pollere*, to be powerful.” He concludes: “pollution is then an injection of strength which disorders” (75). Indeed, by ingesting chemicals, hormones, and animal excrements, we become allergic to our own bodies. The rise of autoimmune diseases in our culture is staggering, reaching an estimated 50 million people (Leach).

In Meredith Sabini’s compilation of C. G. Jung’s writings on nature, *The Earth Has a Soul*, she points out that the physical epidemic of incurable diseases finds its correlate with the corruption of the earth: “The contamination of air, water, and soil on the planet is paralleled by similar disease of blood and tissue in people. [...] One symptom of this is the phenomenal rise in autoimmune disorders in the last decade” (15). There is no possible way we can stay healthy when we rape the earth of its fecundity. When human beings and their magical bodies become ancillary adjuncts to corporate profit-and-loss statements, the very life force that is sucked out of us is equally sucked out of the earth. We find ourselves physically and spiritually depleted as our planet is drained of its nutrients.

Could the holocaust of our food supply be a mirror of what seems like a slow, systematic extinction of our species? Although revolutionaries like Steve Jobs have enabled us to connect with each other across the globe with a click of the keyboard, we are now far more isolated in our global social media networks than our ancestors were in their close-knit communities. In order to maintain our contemporary hyperspeed pace, activities such as work, sex, play, and art are often notated reminders on our blackberries’

“to do” lists. As a result, our primal form of *zoë*, the biological life force, is starving for a cosmogony and mythology that will nourish it.

Sorely deficient in physical and spiritual grounding and lacking a connection to our most essential breath, modern westerners are often detached from their bodies, and consequently, from their instincts. Indeed, the super-marketing of food exemplifies how much we have become separated from the earth: by not knowing the people who farm the food we eat, we have no connection to our food sources. A consequence of severing from the bounties of the earth appears to be a national epidemic of obesity. According to Ogden et al and Flegel et al, one-third of school-age children are either overweight or obese, and two-thirds of American adults suffer from overweight-related illnesses. Indeed, it appears we cannot stuff enough food into our bodies to satisfy our deep hunger for connection.

This loss of connection may also be seen in the changes in our food, especially milk. Milk is thought of as a wholesome food, which it is when in its raw form and sourced from cows fed non-contaminated grass and raised in clean conditions. However, most store-bought milk has been treated to the point that it may be a veritable chemical cocktail. The slogan “milk does a body good” has allowed the massive American Dairy Association to build a pro-pasteurization empire while demonizing raw milk, which may, in fact, be healthier for people than pasteurized milk. Moreover, stories about the magic of raw milk conjure up the very essence of life itself. One such story about the Buddha, who fainted from hunger after seven years of asceticism, tells us that drinking sweet milk resuscitated him: “she poured the cup and eased it against the man’s lips, spilling a few

drops on them. At first he did not respond, but then his lips quivered and parted slightly [...]. Before long the cup was empty. [...] He began to breathe, first shallowly, and then more deeply. His sitting was stable and beautiful” (Hanh 37). These stories embed the good aspect of the Mother archetype in our psyche, while her shadow remains hidden by false advertising.

In order to deconstruct the theory that pasteurized milk is good and raw milk is dangerous, one must understand the history that brought it into existence. As the industrial revolution took place, people continued to ferment beer. A by-product of beer making, spent grain—now devoid of any nutrients but cheaper than grass—was fed to cows as a means of spiking bottom-line profits. However, the milk from spent-grain-fed cows soured quickly and became tainted. Because people were getting sick from drinking this milk, Louis Pasteur invented the pasteurization process, reasoning that boiling the milk would disinfect it. Had he studied the benefits of fermentation and bacteria, he would have observed that fermented beer had actually protected the world from dysentery, black plague, and scurvy when the first settlers came to North America on their boats. Those who drank the barreled water on the boats fell ill, but those drinking unpasteurized, old world beer remained in strong health because it contained hops—a highly medicinal antiviral and antibacterial grain when fermented. In failing to acknowledge that bacteria were important to the digestive ecosystem, Pasteur focused on the microbes that had to be killed.

As the world population grew, the U. S. government piggy-backed on Pasteur’s discovery and introduced hybridization and genetically modified foods as ways to increase productivity. This feed-lot, monocultural dynamic led to serving cows corn,

which is cheaper than grass and allows cows to gorge themselves and get bigger faster. They, too, have become addicted to sources of nourishment that cannot properly feed them. No longer happily grazing in lush, green fields in the open air, as their advertisements commonly suggest, most commercially bred cows are raised in barren, dry lot production systems, also known as confined animal feeding operations, which often house several thousands of animals. Tied up in stalls, the lactating cows show signs of stress from social isolation and the inability to lie down, as well as increased susceptibility to a number of diseases. Only USDA-certified organic farms are required to provide some access to pasture for grazing. However, in 2008, fewer than three percent of U. S. dairy cows were managed on organic farms.

Thus, all commercial milk must be pasteurized because it is often produced in the filthiest conditions imaginable. On these dairy farms, most cows bleed from their nipples because they are kept in lactation, and it hurts them to get pumped every day while hooked up to machines that milk them to the point that their nipples get sores on them (Mercola). The infectious material that comes from these sores from over-milking then gets into the milk. To counter this, cows are given antibiotics in addition to bovine growth hormones, antibiotics, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and chemical pesticides (Mercola). By the time it reaches our tables, our “pristine” milk has been sanitized, fortified, homogenized, standardized, and infused with a chemical called titanium dioxide to make it perfectly vibrant and white (like our perfectly white teeth) as we ingest it with our morning cereal or late night snacks. This capitalistic treatment of milk is devastating not only to the cows, but to our own symbolic life in that we lose

communication with our Mother, we lose relation to her primordial images, and we lose the ability to understand human nature.

To counter the lack of connection between agricultural methods and consumers, there is a movement to return for our food to local farmers, with whom we can have relationships. To know my farmer, to know what breed of cows is being used, to investigate the farmers' habits, and to discern what kind of milk I am drinking—these are the steps I am taking to reconnect with a Mother who supports me. I believe that we are in dire need of re-mythologizing our collective Mother. As Ginette Paris says, “Citizens need protection and nourishment, both of which are archetypes of the Mother” (136). Yet, according to the FDA, raw milk is inherently dangerous and should not be consumed (“Dangers”). It claims that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that more than 800 people in the United States have gotten sick from drinking raw milk or eating cheese made from raw milk since 1998 (“Dangers”). On the other hand, the Weston A. Price Foundation, founded in 1999 to disseminate the research of nutrition pioneer Dr. Weston Price, reported over 215,000 thousand cases of infection, including multiple deaths, from the consumption of pasteurized milk, including 197,000 cases of antimicrobial-resistant *Salmonella* infections from one dairy in California in 1985. Studies show that factory-farmed cattle have 300 times more pathogenic bacteria in their digestive tracts than cattle that are allowed to openly graze in pastures (Price). As Paris claims, “the FDA has betrayed its maternal mission as has happened in no other evolved countries” (136). Praying at the altar of Big Pharma, this massive governmental machinery arguably has allowed the desiccation of the soul of our nation.

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