

Thinking Green!

Essays on Environmentalism,
Feminism, and Nonviolence

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Foreword by Peter Matthiessen



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Women and Power

"True emancipation begins neither at the polls nor in the courts. It begins in women's soul." —Emma Goldman¹

As a teenager growing up into a young woman, I was enraged when I saw how women have been obliterated from the pages of history and the pages of the Bible. Women were subordinated and dependent on men for their realization and value, always needing men as their path to fulfillment. I began to read Rosa Luxemburg's writings, particularly her prison diaries, and to search through biographies of Alexandra Kollontai, George Sand, Emma Goldman, Helen Keller, and other women who have put their very special stamp on history but have been mostly ignored by male historians and male scholars. I set out to rediscover these brave women. I never had much respect for Marx, Engels, and all the other dogmatic male men who theorized and philosophized about the working classes and capital while, at the same time, discriminating against their wives and children and leading the lives of "academic *pashas*," always being rejuvenated by their wives and mistresses. They couldn't even cook or clean or sew or take care of themselves. They always needed women for their most basic needs.

¹ Emma Goldman, "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation," in *The Traffic in Women and Other Essays on Feminism* (Albion, California: Times Change Press, 1970), p. 14.

Men's domination of women is deep and systemic, and it is accepted around the world by most men and many women as "natural," as something that somehow cannot be changed. But norms of human behavior do change. Because the oppression of women is so deeply embedded in our societies and our psyches, it continues to be invisible, even to those who are working to overcome other forms of injustice. Feminism is considered by many people to be one aspect of social justice, but to me it is a principle in and of itself. To rid the world of nuclear weapons and poverty, we must end racism and sexism. As long as white males hold all of the social and economic power, women and people of color will continue to be discriminated against, and poverty and the military mentality will continue unabated. We cannot just analyze structures of domination and oppression. We must also practice disobedience in our own lives, starting by disobeying all systems of male domination.

The system in which men have more value and more social and economic power than women is found throughout the world—East and West, North and South. Women suffer both from structural oppression and from individual men. Too many movements for social justice accept the assumptions of male dominance and ignore the oppression of women, but patriarchy pervades both our political and our personal lives. Feminism rejects all forms of male dominance and affirms the value of women's lives and experiences. It recognizes that no pattern of domination is necessary and seeks to liberate women and men from the structures of dominance that characterize patriarchy.

Many women are beginning to reject the existing systems and styles of male politics. Whether at Greenham Common, Comiso, Australia, Belau, protecting the Hima-

layan forests, or working for peace in Eastern Europe, women have been stirred to action. Motivated to act on our own, not only as mothers and nurturers but also as leaders in a changing world, we must stand up as women and become elected to political and economic offices throughout the world, so we can change the policies and structures from those of death to those of life. We do not need to abrogate our positive, feminist principles of loving, caring, showing emotions, and nurturing. Every individual has both feminine and masculine qualities. We should not relieve men of their responsibility to transform themselves, to develop caring human qualities and become responsible for childcare, housework, and all other essential support work. We will never be able to reclaim the Earth if men do not give up their privileges and share these basic tasks with women. Children are not just the responsibility of their mothers.

The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century contained in it the seeds of today's oppressive technologies. If we trace the myths and metaphors associated with the conquest of nature, we will realize how much we are under the sway of masculine institutions and ideologies. Masculine technology and patriarchal values have prevailed in Auschwitz, Dresden, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and many other parts of the world. The ultimate result of unchecked, terminal patriarchy will be ecological catastrophe or nuclear holocaust.

Feminism is about alleviating women's powerlessness. Women must share half the Earth and half the Sky, on our own terms and with our own self-determined values. Feminism seeks to redefine our very modes of existence and to transform nonviolently the structures of male dominance. I am not saying that women are inherently better

than men. Overturning patriarchy does not mean replacing men's dominance with women's dominance. That would merely maintain the patriarchal pattern of dominance. We need to transform the pattern itself. The work of feminist women and profeminist men is to liberate everyone from a system that is oppressive to women and restrictive to men, and to restore balance and harmony between women and men and between masculine and feminine values in society and within each of us. Feminists working in the peace and ecology movements are sometimes viewed as kind, nurturing Earth mothers, but that is too comfortable a stereotype. We are not meek and we are not weak. We are angry—on our own behalf, for our sisters and children who suffer, and for the entire planet—and we are determined to protect life on Earth.

Green women work together with men on issues like ecology and disarmament. But we must also assert women's oppression as a central concern, for our experience is that men do not take women's oppression as seriously as other causes. There is a clear and profound relationship between militarism, environmental degradation, and sexism. Any commitment to social justice and nonviolence that does not address the structures of male domination of women is incomplete. We will work with our Green brothers, but we will not be subservient to them. They must demonstrate their willingness to give up the privileges of membership in the male caste.

There is a saying: Where power is, women are not. Women must be willing to be powerful. Because we bear scars from the ways men have used their power over us, women often want no part of power. To a certain extent, this is good sense. Patriarchal power has brought us acid rain, global warming, military states, and countless cases

of private suffering. We have all seen men whose power has caused them to lose all sense of reality, decency, and imagination, and we are right to fear such power. But playing an active part in society, on an equal footing with men, does not mean adopting the old thought patterns and strategies of the patriarchal world. It means putting our own ideas of an emancipatory society into practice. Rather than emulating Margaret Thatcher and others who loyally adapt themselves to male values of hierarchy, we must find our own definitions of power that reflect women's values and women's experience. Jean Baker Miller points out how women, though closed out of male dominions of power, experience great power in the daily work of nurturing others.² This is not power *over* others, but power *with* others, the kind of shared power that has to replace patriarchal power.

Women in the Green movement are committed to fighting the big wars—the destruction of nature, imperial politics, militarism, and the like. But we are just as determined to end the little wars that take place against women every day, often invisibly. Women's suffering seems so normal and is so pervasive that it is scarcely noticed. These restrictions, degradations, and acts of violence are so embedded in our societies that they appear natural, but they are not natural. The system of which these are a part has been constructed over centuries by laws and through institutions that were developed by men and excluded women. We want to end these forms of oppression by doing away with the power and mentality that produced and maintains them.

² Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986. Second edition).

There are many structures of domination—nation over nation, class over class, race over race, humans over nature. But domination of women by men is a constant feature within every other aspect of oppression. Male dominance is typical of other patterns of domination across all cultural divides. It is the basis of the systems of politics that have brought the world to its present, extreme state. It is the pattern that connects acts of individual rape with the ecological rape of our planet.

In *Sisterhood Is Global*, Robin Morgan describes the daily war against women:

While women represent half the global population and one-third of the labor force, they receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than one percent of world property. They also are responsible for two-thirds of all working hours.... Not only are females most of the poor, the starving, and the illiterate, but women and children constitute more than 90 percent of all refugee populations. Women outlive men in most cultures and therefore *are* the elderly of the world, as well as being the primary caretakers of the elderly.... In industrialized countries, women still are paid only one-half to three-quarters of what men earn at the same jobs, still are ghettoized into lower-paying, "female-intensive" job categories, and still are the last hired and the first fired.³

Just as patriarchy is global, so too is sisterhood. The most pernicious of all patriarchal tactics is to keep women divided. We feminists in Europe and North America have

³ Robin Morgan, "Planetary Feminism: The Politics of the 21st Century," in *Sisterhood Is Global* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 1-2.

been so occupied with our own struggles that we have neglected our solidarity with women's struggles in other parts of the world. Today, and perhaps throughout history, indigenous women's movements have mobilized to defend human life and nature. Women of the Chipko movement are defending the forests in India. In Belau, women are demanding nuclear-free constitutions. Women have been instrumental in the democratic movements in the Philippines, South Africa, Central America, and among indigenous peoples everywhere. In the Middle East, Israeli and Palestinian feminists have maintained a dialogue toward peace based on the recognition of their common experience as women. It is essential that we work with and learn from our sisters throughout the world. Feminist women and profeminist men must recognize the particular urgency of women's struggles in the Third World. Over the last thirty-five years, the gap between rich and poor nations has widened. As the poor become poorer, women, being the poorest of the poor, suffer the most acutely. When one considers women as a single worldwide caste, it is not difficult to see that, despite some progress, our situation remains dire.

Third World women are oppressed both by national and international injustices and by family systems that give husbands, fathers, and brothers absolute priority. Even where economic development benefits poor families, it is often of no benefit to poor women, for inequality and exploitation exist within families as well as between them. The unfair sexual distribution of power, resources, and responsibilities is legitimized by ancient traditions, socialized into women's own attitudes, enshrined in law, and enforced when necessary by male violence.

Women constitute the largest group of landless laborers in the world. Though they do much of the work in

most agricultural regions, because land ownership is generally the domain of men, women have even less security than male tenants or employees. In many places, a woman may be evicted by her husband upon divorce or by her husband's male relatives upon his death. Membership in cooperatives is often restricted to men. While cash crop programs boost men's incomes, women are called upon to help with the extra work, while their own food crops are shifted to more distant or less fertile plots. Agricultural extension services are staffed almost exclusively by men and addressed to helping men.

Industrial development and urbanization have worsened an already unjust division of labor between women and men. Factory production wipes out domestic handicrafts businesses on which women depend, but women are at a disadvantage competing with men for factory jobs because their educational qualifications are lower and they are more likely to be raising children. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate are women. In Nairobi, half the working women earn less than a poverty wage, compared to 20 percent of the men. Studies in both developed and developing countries reveal that men enjoy more free time than women. A survey in Zaire assessed that men did only 30 percent of the amount of work women do. In most of Africa and Asia, women work, on average, sixteen-hour days, jeopardizing their own health and that of their children.

Besides housework and childcare, many heavy chores are universally relegated to women. For Masai women of Kenya's Rift Valley, fetching up to fifty pounds of water at a time can take up to five hours a day. Gathering a similar weight of wood for cooking may be a two-hour job, and much longer in areas of extensive deforestation. The notorious "double day," in which women work as a full unit

of economic production and also do all the unpaid housework and childcare, is spreading in agrarian societies as well as in industrial ones. It is one of the longest lasting of women's oppressions.

Throughout the Third World, women are dismissed, overlooked, and overworked. The examples given here barely scratch the surface. We who live in industrialized countries must challenge the sexism of our own countries' programs of international development aid. Legal discriminations must be removed, and women must have equal access to the benefits of these programs. To those who say it is not up to us in the industrialized world to tell those in the Third World how to live, I agree. Let it be up to those societies to determine their own courses. But let *everyone* be included, not only the men.

Courageous women in the ecology, human rights, and feminist movements in the Third World have taught me about the link between the violation of nature and the violation and marginalization of women. Meeting aboriginal women in Australia, women in the alternative movements in India, and feminist ecologists around the globe, I have seen how ecofeminists in the Third World are deeply challenging many concepts the West has defended until now. Indian physicist Vandana Shiva describes how Western science ignores or excludes certain bodies of knowledge while elevating itself. This arrogance, she tells us, constitutes a great threat to our planet.

While Third World women have privileged access to survival expertise, their knowledge is inclusive, not exclusive. The ecological categories with which they think and act can become the categories of liberation for all, for men as well as for women, for

West as well as the non-West, and for the human as well as the non-human elements of the earth.¹

Many Greens, including myself, have been inspired by the work of nonviolent men like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Cesar Chavez. We know far less about contributions to nonviolence by women like Dorothy Day, Rosa Parks, and the women in the recent nonviolent revolutions in Eastern Europe. Invisibility of women is a familiar pattern of male dominance, even within otherwise progressive movements. Much of the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance in awakening people's consciences derives from the willingness of those practicing it to accept suffering. But because women's suffering is taken for granted, in the eyes of the media and the general public the work of nonviolent women is less noteworthy and carries less virtue than that of men. Media coverage of the women at Greenham Common, for example, who endured great hardship camping out during one of England's harshest winters to protest American militarism, concentrated not on what they were doing or why, but on their families who were "left behind to cope" without them.

Women's power arouses great hostility in the male-dominated media. As a woman active and visible in politics, I experience this often. In the early 1980s, when I was a speaker for the Green Party in Parliament, a reporter asked in an interview what was wrong with me, an intelligent, clever, attractive, and unmarried young woman, that would cause me to be involved in politics, a realm he clearly considered the exclusive province of men. (Perhaps he thought I was looking for a husband.) I turned

¹ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 244.

and walked out. The women present—the staff, the studio's cleaning women—supported me, but the reporter, to this day, has never understood why I left the interview. In 1985, *Penthouse* published a degrading pornographic cartoon of me; I brought suit against them.

Incidents like these should not surprise anyone. The media, for the most part, perpetuate double standards and sexist stereotypes: Women are sex toys for men; women's lives count less than those of men; women who assert their independence and power are in some way defective. Freedom of the press is one of the most important freedoms, and it must never be curtailed. But protection from sexism must also be recognized as a full human right. I do not believe that freedom of the press includes the right to sell sexist images of women to the general public.

As women assert ourselves, we face the question of whether we should seek access to every male arena of power, even at the price of giving up feminist principles. My own feeling is that we cannot forsake women's liberation by accepting a patriarchal interpretation of equality. We must work from our own values and elevate their influence to those of men. It cannot be part of feminist logic to seek access to all professions, no matter how inhumane. In Germany this question has been focused on the issue of women's conscription into the military. Under the cloak of equality, men in the federal government have moved to pass legislation calling for conscription of women. It is ridiculous that the equality we want is possible in the military but not in other sectors of society. I do not want to see women stand equal with our brothers, fathers, and husbands in nuclear command centers, on battle fronts, or in meeting rooms where the deaths of thousands are planned. As one woman working for peace said, "To es-

tablish more equal relations between the sexes, rather than training women to kill, let men learn to nurture life." For centuries, we have been locked out of power in male-dominated societies. We should not now allow ourselves to be cynically manipulated by men who wish to exploit our legitimate needs and aspirations by granting us power on their terms to serve their ends. We must work for ends consistent with feminist values. There should not be women in the military. Take the men out.

Because the world's governments are unable to sustain and guarantee peace, the women at Greenham Common formed a living chain around a military weapons base. I call upon women everywhere, young and old, to form a chain around the world, to resist those who say war is inevitable, and to love only those men who are willing to speak out against the violence. We all need to join together—women uncorrupted by male power and men opposed to violence who wish to break out of the rigid patriarchal institutions.

Throughout history, male-led social movements have always been mere exchanges of power, while the basic structure of dominant hierarchies has remained. The liberation of women and men from the bonds of patriarchy is essential to the work of building a peaceful, just, and ecological society. I often hear people arguing about the world's many evils and which should be the first confronted. This fragmentary approach is itself part of the problem, reflecting the linear, hierarchical nature of patriarchal thinking that fails to grasp the complexity of living systems. What is needed is a perspective that integrates the many problems we face and approaches them holistically. Working towards such a future begins by living now in accord with what we seek to bring forth.