

## Reflections on the Masculine Hegemon: A Reply to Richard Twine

By Lee Hall\*

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

In “Masculinity, Nature, Ecofeminism”, Richard Twine has elaborated on Australian sociologist Bob Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, a gender performance intended to guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.<sup>1</sup> The better part of a decade has passed since Twine asked “why there are no direct action groups of men, skilled in media exploitation akin to environmental groups, voicing public political protest against male dominance” and it appears that Twine’s question is still ahead of its time. Perhaps more so.

In our time, global politics could hardly be less feminist. Some know the work of Vandana Shiva; some are acquainted with the writings of Arundhati Roy; but who is not familiar with the violent visions of G.W. Bush or Osama bin Laden? Or with images of pitiless prison guards, bulldozers, blurred suspects on cameras in the London Underground? Today, the idea of power is associated not with life-affirming qualities, but with monstrous authority. Its quintessence is “full-spectrum dominance.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Twine, “Masculinity, Nature, Ecofeminism” (1997), available at [www.ecofem.org/journal](http://www.ecofem.org/journal) (last visited 28 Jul. 2005).

<sup>2</sup> “Full-spectrum dominance means the ability of U.S. forces, operating alone or with allies, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the range of military operations.” Jim Garamone, “Joint Vision 2020 Emphasizes Full-spectrum Dominance” in the American Forces Press Service (2 Jun. 2000), available at [http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2000/n06022000\\_20006025.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2000/n06022000_20006025.html) (updated 14 Jan. 2003; last visited 11 Aug. 2005).

The most recent competition for the position of the world's leading military supremacist was a puerile yet sinister duel between candidate John Kerry and the incumbent Bush. The peak of their public rivalry featured Senator Kerry's hunting trip. In a widely photographed scene, the candidate returned from the trip, armed and wearing camouflage, a member of the entourage following and holding a limp goose by the neck. Kerry smiled for the snapshots, empty hand overhead with an upwardly pointed thumb.

The role of the sacrificial geese was clear. Bush had earlier announced a state of armed conflict, to carry out what was essentially an international police action, without pausing for a declaration from the government's Congressional branch. The blood of the birds underscored Kerry's agreement with Bush that the U.S. may objectify, occupy, and kill to comply with a president's urgings.

Geese assertively protect their nests and offspring, but they usually pose no threat of aggression. They support each other in times of stress, forging lifelong bonds. And Kerry assured the voting populace that he was not the sort of wimp who ponders such matters. Kerry lost the race by the narrowest of margins. The voters sent no public message of disapproval to either of these two contenders.

A competent pro-peace candidate was available, but very few people took note.<sup>3</sup> Flags and ribbon stickers were stocked at every filling station. The populace -- except for a few exasperated immigrants' rights advocates -- was filled with patriotic urgings. Dissent was slammed under a tidal wave of red, white, and blue.

Meanwhile, publicity experts for the incumbents, Bush and Vice President Cheney, constructed their own symbol for the Other: footage of wolves, accompanied by narration

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<sup>3</sup> Presidential candidate Ralph Nader and vice presidential running mate Peter Miguel Camejo have long promoted peace, fair trade, and environmental activism. In the 2004 presidential election, the team received just over 459,000 votes (less than 0.4 percent of the popular vote). More on the striking difference between Nader and the two other candidates appears in a Nader For President 2004 press release, "Nader: Is there no end to Kerry's 'Me-Too-ism' with Bush on Iraq?", available at

linking the lupine group to “those who are waiting to do America harm.” One of John Kerry’s aides reportedly suggested responding with a scene in which Kerry, wearing camouflage, would shoot the wolves.<sup>4</sup> The writing was on the wall for peace activists, environmentalists, and animal advocates. As these advertisements ran their course, the state of Alaska was issuing permits to aerial gunning teams to chase down and shoot the state’s small tribes of wolves.<sup>5</sup>

The 2004 campaign scene, and the public commentary that followed it,<sup>6</sup> provided a high-impact illustration of Twine’s observation that “hegemonic masculinity is partly configured by a dominating and alienated relation to nature” and that “in discussions of men and emotions, or men and violence, or men and embodiment, the category of ‘nature’ is always lurking there in the background yet is not given sufficient direct attention.”<sup>7</sup> The geese and wolves were of interest merely in relation to newsworthy politicians. They served as voodoo dolls, representing the world of people not under the hegemonic control of the United States. They also served as demonstrations of the

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[http://www.votenader.org/media\\_press/index.php?cid=147](http://www.votenader.org/media_press/index.php?cid=147) (dated 10 Aug. 2004; last visited 13 Aug. 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See Maureen Dowd, “More Dead Animals Might Do the Trick for Kerry” in *The Age* (Melbourne, Victoria; 27 Oct. 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Alaska’s wolf population in 2004 was estimated at 7,000 to 9,000. “Editorial: Wolf ‘Control’ in Alaska”, *New York Times* (14 Mar. 2004), Section 4, at 12. In nearly 20,000 square miles of the state, new regulations called for an 80 percent “temporary” reduction in the wolf population, but as a writer in the *New York Times* stated, “a reduction on that scale is merely likely to be the first step towards the total elimination of wolves.” Ibid. The writer went on to decry the “savagery of humans” who were “deploying an air force to hunt animals.” Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> See Dowd, supra note 4, stating: “In yet another attempt to prove to George W. Bush that he is man enough to run this country, John Kerry made an animal sacrifice to the political gods in a cornfield in eastern Ohio last week.” Describing the new advertisement used by the Bush’s Republican party campaign, Dowd writes: “Even as they mocked the Democrat for trying to be macho with a wildlife tableau, the Republicans were trying to be macho with a wildlife tableau.” Dowd provides the wolf advertisement’s narration: “In an increasingly dangerous world, even after the first terrorist attack on America, John Kerry and the liberals in Congress voted to slash America’s intelligence operation by \$6 billion, cuts so deep they would have weakened America’s defenses. And weakness attracts those who are waiting to do America harm.”

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*

prevailing attitude that the beings of untamed places should be brought under control. Nature was the indistinct backdrop for the match between two figures contending for the top spot in their political hierarchy, where success depended on a cavalier willingness to draw somebody else's blood.

Moreover, in the campaign platforms of both parties, nature itself was primarily considered as something to drill. The Bush administration's ties to oil corporations is well known. Kerry had taken a protective stand regarding the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but was keen to dispel any notions that sidelining Bush would mean unwieldy environmental solicitude. When a newscaster asked whether Kerry had been correctly quoted as promising to "drill like never before, drill all over the United States to create more jobs", Kerry promptly replied, "I'm also for the drilling in the 95 percent of the Alaska oil shelf that's up for leasing now."<sup>8</sup>

### **Woman-hating on a national scale**

The politicians' critics could have done with some feminist understanding as well. In "The S&M War", Justin Raimondo, the editorial director of *Antiwar.com*, offered this description of images of detainees at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq: "Iraqi prisoners squirm on the prison floor in the buff, clotted together like worms on a wet sidewalk, while burly American guards loom over them, poking and prodding; a female soldier holds a leash at the other end of which is an Iraqi neck."<sup>9</sup> Raimondo then discusses the picture of Arab warfare painted by psychologist David Leo Gutmann. Referring to

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<sup>8</sup> "Kerry: I Will Stand by My Record" is a transcript of CNN anchor Judy Woodruff's interview of John Kerry, posted to CNN.com on 19 Feb. 2004. Kerry's reply was:

I think he -- I said exactly what my policy has been all my life. Which is I'm for the natural gas pipeline. Absolutely. I voted for the natural gas pipeline. I think it's important to build it. And so do most Americans. I'm also for the drilling in the 95 percent of the Alaska oil shelf that's up for leasing now. In fact, President Clinton put out the biggest lease in American history in that part of the shelf. I'm not for drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge and I haven't changed and I won't change.

<sup>9</sup> Justin Raimondo, "The S&M War" (7 May 2004), available at <http://www.antiwar.com/justin/?articleid=2490> (last visited 1 Aug. 2005).

Gutmann's descriptions of the traditional "Bedouin raid" by which Arabs simultaneously took advantage of and shamed the enemy, Raimondo posits that the U.S. military has projected "images of powerless, feminized Arab men" to apply Gutmann's conclusions, in order to "so load the Arabs down with shame that they will be rendered pacific psychologically."

As quoted by Raimondo, Dr. Gutmann also states that a "major aim of terrorist operations" is "symbolic emasculation" and that terrorism succeeds when "enemies have been psychologically castrated, symbolically re-gendered into women." And this too is relevant, Raimondo decides, because through incidents such as Abu Ghraib, the invading forces can psychologically castrate and "re-gender" the entire Iraqi population into women to quiet them. Such an attempt to connect an unwillingness to fight with castration is not unusual in popular political discourse. An Internet site named *Thoseshirts.com* has featured a photo of a shirt with the message "I neutered the cat. Now he's French."

Raimondo refers to "Gutmann's cockamamie theory" as "just the kind of 'scientific' lunacy that naturally entralls the bureaucratic-military mind". Here, Raimondo suggests that Gutmann's psychological analysis of the Arab aggressor is misguided; therefore, the U.S. military is similarly misguided to apply it in reverse. Yet Raimondo does equate powerlessness and abject degradation with femaleness: "If those photos represent anything," opines Raimondo, "symbolic emasculation certainly fits the bill. Forced to wear women's clothing, simulate homosexual acts, and undergo other forms of degradation, it looks like the calculus of shame is being turned back on the Iraqis."

Because Raimondo does not stop to ask why references to women and homosexuals are components of degradation, the essay appears to take for granted what demands the most rigorous questions. The detainees are naked and squirming; therefore, they're "re-gendered" men. Forced to perform homosexual acts, they are "feminized, powerless". Raimondo never squarely challenges the absurdity of portraying an occupied country as a

country consisting entirely of women. All that's clear in Raimondo's piece is its disdain for a psychological theory that the "Arab mind" would be thus motivated, and the wrong-headedness of using erroneous conception of an ethnic group as a basis for formulating a propaganda war.

Key questions go unasked in an interrogation of war that has gender as a central part of its narrative yet fails to interrogate that component. If being female can be equated with debilitating shame, who accepts that link? Why? Does the propaganda war on Iraq reflect pathological conceptions of human relationships at Western hearths and homes? Because Raimondo reports but does not question the equation of femaleness with mutilated maleness, the essay also fails to grasp the point that men are routinely mutilated and degraded in war.<sup>10</sup> One should not have to hold up pictures of people posed in naked pyramids to understand this. Peace activists who continue to see soldiers as powerful, rather than the debased, mutilated, and objectified beings they actually become, unwittingly cling to the ideas that present war as a dignified undertaking.

But the acceptance of routine domination is inculcated in us from our earliest conscious moments. So much so, that it becomes generally invisible. The extremes of Abu Ghraib could be understood as a message, as a mirror of our culture. Usually, however, they are seen as bizarre aberrations. Thus, Western media outlets perceived Abu Ghraib as an outlandish act that diminished the reputation of the occupation forces. Decrying the "S&M War" suggests that there might be some kind of psychologically healthy or normal war.

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<sup>10</sup> Psychologist Richard A. Koenigsberg states suggests that "the First World War constituted a gigantic, sacrificial ritual. Young men were thrown onto the altars ... to die and be mutilated in the name of Gods called France, England, Germany, Russia, Italy etc." Koenigsberg cites Joanna Bourke's book, *Dismembering the Male*, who has perceived the male body during war as "intended to be mutilated". Koenigsberg further quotes a French lieutenant on the battlefield at Verdun, who described his men, when about to fight, as "drunk, howling out patriotic airs, or weeping with emotion or despair." One soldier reportedly bleated: "Baa, baa, I am the sheep on the way to the slaughterhouse." Richard Koenigsberg, "Virility and Slaughter: Battle Strategy of the First World War" (2005), available at <http://home.earthlink.net/~libraryofsocialscience/virility.htm> (last visited 12 Aug. 2005).

As Twine observes, one of the basic feminist premises holds that “our dominant cultural institutions have been built upon and evolved along lines that embody and express hegemonic masculinity.” This norm is enforced by the threat that those who fail to promote it, whether in personal relationships, business or politics, will be ridiculed as “emasculated” -- an idea that insults the individual thus degraded and, at the same time, insults women as an entire class. The essence of this idea’s disturbing appeal was tapped in the most overt fashion by California’s governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, in a speech delivered at the height of public excitement over the presidential race. After urging that “we must be fierce and relentless and terminate terrorism”, the governor brought the crowd to an ecstatic ovation by attacking Bush’s opponents’ meagre “faith in free enterprise” and exhorting, “Don’t be economic girlie-men.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Performing humanity**

Take a chance, won't you? Knock down the fences that divide. Tear apart the walls that imprison. Reach out; freedom lies just on the other side.

- Justice Thurgood Marshall

To the extent that hegemonic masculinity has defined human nature, Twine recommends a critique that “involves a simultaneous exposure of the arbitrary definitions of our dominant understanding of ‘humanity’.” Here, Twine suggests that “there is a similar degree of mythology and performativity to our ‘human’ identity, just as there is as we live through different genders.” How far does this enquiry extend? The meaning of social humanity is the first layer of the question. The meaning of species distinction is another. Have we seen ourselves -- that is, the class which controls the rest of the biocommunity of which we are a part -- as members of a deceptively insular category?

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<sup>11</sup> Arnold Schwarzenegger, Republican National Convention Address (New York, 31 Aug. 2004). Audio-visual tape available at American Rhetoric [www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/convention2004/arnoldschwarzenegger2004rnc.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/convention2004/arnoldschwarzenegger2004rnc.htm) (last visited 1 Aug. 2005).

In 1998, a widely printed news article called bonobos “the feminist apes.”<sup>12</sup> Bonobos live in an obscure area of the Congo River basin, and, fortunately for them, scientists didn't seem to notice them until the 1970s. (Once discovered, they became laboratory and zoo specimens.) Bonobos, who are just as related to humans as are chimpanzees, challenge theories that the pattern of human evolution is inseparable from aggressive competition.<sup>13</sup>

Bonobos reportedly disregard size, looking instead to bonds with key females to establish their social roles. They typically resolve social tension not through force, threats, or fights, but with sex. They have been noted for their ability to view the world from someone else's perspective, and thus have been the subjects in some of the best-known examples of altruism in the non-human sphere.<sup>14</sup> And although evolutionists had pictured early human society as resembling that of chimpanzees, which in turn is often described as hierarchical and controlled by war-like males, primatologist Frans de Waal has said that “[w]e may be more bonobo-like than we want to admit.”<sup>15</sup> But feminism would see our similarity as a positive sign for humanity. Finding patterns of co-operative relationships in other animal networks, and acknowledging that we could evolve emotionally by respecting their members rather than capturing, dominating, training, and experimenting on them, could well be the altruism that saves ourselves, and guides us to a truly civil society.

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<sup>12</sup> Luran Neergaard (Associated Press), “Bonobos Settle Problems by Having Sex”, *Fort Worth (Texas) Star Telegram* (11 May 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Humanity is but one group within the taxonomic category *homoidea* -- a class which has also been defined as including chimpanzees, gorillas, bonobos, and orang-utans. *See generally* the second chapter of Richard Byrne, *The Thinking Ape: Evolutionary Origins of Intelligence* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Lee Hall and Anthony Jon Waters, “From Property to Person: The Case of Evelyn Hart”, *Seton Hall Constitutional Law Journal* (2000), available online at [www.personhood.org](http://www.personhood.org) (last visited 12 Aug. 2005).

<sup>15</sup> See “Bonobos Settle Problems by Having Sex”, *supra* note 12. Frans de Waal's 1997 book *Bonobo: The Forgotten Ape* was one of the first to focus on bonobos.

Feminist writers have shown how the controlling class relies on constructed difference in order to dominate, and we might contemplate a broadening of that proposition: Drawing a bright line between the human species and the rest of conscious life, rather than acknowledging a continuum, has obstructed the expansion of our moral sphere, and it has hindered us from learning from those outside that sphere. It is possible to change this viewpoint. Consider a proposition from another optimist, Noel Ignatiev.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Ignatiev observes the fluidity of dominance: The Irish moved, in the nineteenth century, “from being members of an oppressed race in Ireland to being members of an oppressing race in the United States.” At one point in this transition, the Irish were known as “white Negroes” and the Africans were referred to as “smoked Irish.” But over time, declares Ignatiev, “the Irish became white.”

And not just by looks.<sup>17</sup> To overcome Protestants’ resistance to extending civil rights, the Irish both subjugated and dissociated themselves from Africans. And in this way, they succeeded in changing the membership rules of the white social club. At birth, people are “enrolled in that club without their consent or permission,” and membership dictates whether they will be channelled into skilled work or into the army, prison, or the warehouse. Club members usually “go through life accepting the rules and accepting the benefits of membership, without ever considering the costs.” If they would flout and transcend the rules of conformity, Ignatiev posits, people would zero in on class issues, “which would open the door for all sorts of social and political changes that haven’t happened yet, largely because some people settle for being white rather than take a chance on being free.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Danny Postel’s “Interview with Noel Ignatiev” was originally broadcast on WZRD-FM Radio in Chicago (17 Mar. 1996), and is currently available at <http://www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/jan97postel.htm> (last visited 12 Aug. 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Noel Ignatiev states, “No one has any control over how they were born, how they look, or any of that. So far as I’m concerned those things make no difference. I’m talking about what’s going on in people’s minds.” Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> I agree with Richard Twine’s position that “we cannot reduce all oppression to class” -- or to gender. In considering Ignatiev’s suggestions, then, I would also suggest that we cannot reduce

And it could be done. Ignatiev asserts that landing on the shores of the new world means being culturally mixed, with a strong African influence:

And Americans by and large enjoy this--although they're not quite willing to admit it. They prefer to deny it. ... So what I like to say is that the United States is the largest country in the world of people who pass for white. There are a couple hundred million of them who are denying the black presence within their own souls and hearts.

Note the similarity between Professor Ignatiev's words and de Waal's view that we may be more bonobo-like than some want to admit -- for the bonobos' strength is associated with non-masculine strength.<sup>19</sup> The ideal to which we are conditioned to aspire is white; it is male; and it distances itself from or subjugates those beings who are associated with the natural world.

### **The problem of ranking oppressions**

Often, we see one oppressed group compared with a second group which is even more different or despised to degrade the first. All oppressed human groups have been

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all oppression to class any more than we can reduce it all to perceived race. Yet if Ignatiev's idea of challenging class is read in a broad way -- that is, if we define "class" to mean any position in an oppressive hierarchy, then we can begin to transcend that structure rather than to obey the rules of yet another form of it. Twine suggests that "[t]his search for a better framework is where ecofeminism comes in."

<sup>19</sup> I acknowledge the history of insulting members of certain human subcategories by associating them with non-humanity, and the risk of being misunderstood here as perpetuating the pattern. Writes Catharine MacKinnon, "When your name is used to degrade others by attribution, it locates your relative standing as well, such as when "girl" is used as an insult among boys. CATHARINE MACKINNON, *WOMEN'S LIVES, MEN'S LAWS*, Part I, "Equality Re-Envisioned", Chapter 9, "Of Mice and Men: A Fragment on Animal Rights" (2005) [hereinafter MACKINNON, *WOMEN'S LIVES*] at 94.

I do not view non-membership in the human club as signifying a lower rung on the hierarchy of being, and would not feel at all insulted to be compared with a bonobo. And if such a comparison offends any of us, it should affect no human group disproportionately. No human group is classified as anything but *Homo sapiens*; and whatever biological connection that has to other animals, all of its members would be found to share that connection. The point of this essay is not to call various individuals or groups equivalents, but to interrogate the framework of domination.

compared, in a derogatory manner, to non-humans. Because oppression frequently includes name-calling and threatens to annihilate the very core of one's identity, the making of such comparisons has an especially grating effect. Modern feminists and civil rights advocates pay particular attention to discrimination accompanied by such comparisons, which really provided a justification for the exploiters to treat other groups not as non-human but rather as *sub*-human. As Alice Walker points out, a significant proportion of readily available pornographic material, particularly material featuring black women as subjects, continues to draw these insidious parallels.<sup>20</sup>

So rather than compare, contrast, rank, or decry the ranking of affronts to humans and other conscious individuals, it is important to find the basis for exploitation that fosters oppression wherever it is found. Enlightenment will not come from a worldview arranged by ordering various groups according to levels of priority. Viewing oppression through a holistic lens will mean focusing on the dynamic of domination itself, and, at the same time, being able to identify with any individual being subjugated. Whereas sympathy with the oppressed leads to charitable responses, identification with them leads us to demand just treatment. Feminist scholarship can inform activists' decisions by bearing witness to the pitfalls of accepting chivalry instead of respect.

To really transcend racial prejudice, Noel Ignatiev similarly suggests that people must go beyond mere sympathy. It's not enough, that is, to have speeches about the wrongness of prejudice. The key is identification. It works this way. Every person who looks white has heard race jokes. Even silent sympathy for the butt of the joke, claims Ignatiev, promotes white bonding. For an identification, Ignatiev suggests consistently responding,

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<sup>20</sup> See Alice Walker, "Coming Apart: By Way of Introduction to Lorde, Teish and Gardner," *YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD WOMAN DOWN* (1981; originally published 1971). In the introduction to the essay, Walker writes that the

ancient roots of modern pornography are to be found in the almost always pornographic treatment of black women, who, from the moment they entered slavery, even in their own homelands, were subjected to rape as the 'logical' convergence of sex and violence. Conquest, in short. ...We need only think of the black women used as breeders, raped for the pleasure and profit of their owners.

“Oh, you probably said that because you think I’m white; that’s a mistake that people often make because I look white.” Ignatiev notes that when five or ten per cent of money in circulation is counterfeit, people lose confidence in the official currency. “White skin is the official currency of this society” and if five to ten per cent of people who looked white relinquished the identification, white skin would lose its value, and authority figures “would no longer be sure about how to perform their function.” With racism thus disarmed, we’d create possibilities that could transform our culture, in Ignatiev’s words, “into the dream that it might be.” Left to its own devices, however, racism draws potentially radical working people into white supremacy and similar movements.

### **The official currencies of society**

The great rule is not to talk about money with people who have much more or much less than you.

- Katharine Whitehorn

Skin tone is society’s official currency, asserts Noel Ignatiev. But it’s not the only official currency. Being deemed male at birth means inheriting a currency just as valuable to the officialdom of our culture; indeed it is nearly universally considered the foremost coinage. In the following statement, note that Ignatiev talks of the white club without calling attention to the male club; yet it could not be clearer that both, simultaneously, enjoy special memberships:

Another example is the job market and the implication of the unions in controlling the job market and maintaining a kind of father-son system of continuity--particularly in some of the remnants of the skilled trades industries, where plumbers and carpenters, and so forth, can pass on what amounts to the right to work in these industries from father to son, uncle to nephew, in a way that excludes black people.

And ask a non-citizen what’s unstated there, yet just as obvious, about the devaluation of the migrant’s social currency. At various times, in various places, having to depend on a devalued social currency can mean dealing with the threat of immediate physical danger.

For people perceived as lacking whiteness, masculinity, or citizenship, the risks include harassment, physical assault, even death.

I enjoy jogging. On several occasions, passing strangers have verbally identified me as female, and, sometimes approaching me in a car, other times standing in my path, loudly uttered misogynist slurs in my direction. This had the effect, doubtless the intended effect, of placing me in a state of feeling physically endangered. An undocumented worker whose car breaks down on the public roadway, or a youth of African descent who is pulled over at night, is likely to feel similarly vulnerable. Lacking the valued currency, we are aware of being considered other, constructed as vulnerable; we experience first-hand the real-world dangers.

I am also an animal rights advocate. And I know that if I were perceived as non-human, an animal making my way along the same route, I could be run over, chased openly, trapped, or shot dead -- and, in the case of an unowned animal, without even the hesitation that goes along with suspecting that the victim might have some enforceable legal recourse. The animal lacks even the smallest stitch of protective personhood. The animal cannot carry even a devalued form of currency. And so, as I run along my route, I am constantly conscious of my own skin, my membership in the human club. How do I transcend sympathy and actually identify with those of the animal world? The only answer that comes to mind at the moment would involve imagining some extraterrestrial tribe of beings who arrive on the earth and, being more capable and advanced than ourselves, but not having any way of hearing or understanding our words or cries, proceeded to debate whether to consume us, experiment on us, or wrap us up and carry us home to use as playthings. All I could say is, please, let us alone. Don't sever our community ties to try to introduce us into your more advanced culture; don't talk about how well you should care for us before using us up. Don't try to mimic our natural habitat so that we can live and reproduce when you display us. Don't do it even if you know we are going to blow ourselves up or go extinct under the melting ice caps. Don't apply any legal framework to us. Just go in peace. That's the only right, in such a

scenario, that would make sense. Perhaps the people who are subjugated by colonial forces come as near as anyone can to feeling this in an immediate way.

A serious exploration of Richard Twine's questions might well require that we at least contemplate such a shift in perspective. If, as Twine asserts, hegemonic masculinity is built upon the imperative to control all that is placed under the term 'nature', then to relinquish the privileges of dominion would mean to consciously unravel our concept of man. Man, that is, a gender, a packet of taxonomical assumptions, a bundle of invincibility and authority over nature; man, that measure of all things, has constructed the definitions of sameness and otherness -- and, hence, status. In Twine's words,

Ecofeminism is a decisive social movement since it is one of the first to coherently question this particular 'human'. Historically, emancipatory movements have been concerned with tackling de-humanisation. I suggest that they now should be as much about creating new human identities.

### **Release of psychic toxins**

Twine sees the masculine identity as understanding "nature" in an internal and external sense. First, there is "a man's own emotional and embodied life", and second, there is a looking outward, mastering those human groups seen as "closer to nature"-- defined by Twine as "women, racialised groups, but also what we traditionally think of as nature -- wilderness, animals and so on." Hegemonic masculinity, then, is built upon the imperative to control all that is called "nature", with nature meaning one's own selfhood and also the other. What is other, an ecofeminist analysis would reveal, includes everyone and everything fit to be dominated, everyone and everything that helps to define the dominator by being What I am not. One who sets out to relinquish the controller identity will change one's perceptions of oneself and that which was other. This begins, as Twine puts it, when one sets out to "think emotionally about his relationship to nature." Twine explains: "In doing so he can be said to be also at least partly practising something counter to hegemonic masculinity. He begins to break the link of interdependency that

exists between hegemonic masculinity and those discourses which resource, objectify and expel nature.”

Twine’s essay calls attention to the difficulties likely to arise in all people, regardless of gender identification, who encounter consciousness-raising ideas, and who inform others about such ideas. These people are likely to be confronted with the caricatures of feminism that arise as part of the resistance to its egalitarian principles. Perhaps the best remedy for this resistance is talking openly, both in broad terms and regarding personal situations, about the real problems created by male dominance. This is important because, as pointed out by Catharine MacKinnon and other feminist writers, we live in a culture that either refuses to accept that inequality exists, or acknowledges inequality but accepts it as the result of natural differences.<sup>21</sup>

Because of those entrenched social patterns, many miss the irony when social movements are appropriated as settings for swashbuckling displays. As Twine observes, class struggles frequently focus on the heroic romanticism of taking on the system and enforcing social justice. This point is readily applicable to the militant groups associated in the public discourse with environmentalism or animal rights issues or both.

An article on militant activism, in e-mail circulation as I write, includes a photo: an Animal Liberation Front logo superimposed over a silhouette of a figure standing, fist raised, before a burning building.<sup>22</sup> Without a trace of irony, the essay’s author refers to the Animal Liberation Front and the Earth Liberation Front as “non-hierarchical” groups. Threats of deliberate violence work to change the natural balance of power by infusing it with authority; they are hallmarks of hierarchy-creation. Indeed, the writer underscores

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<sup>21</sup> When inequality is noticed, it’s often addressed as something natural, eternal, and therefore not subject to change. In MacKinnon’s words: “We see denial that each hierarchy involves socially organized power, combined with justifications of why one group, because of natural superiority, should have what is, in substance, power, dominion, and sovereignty over the other.” MACKINNON, *WOMEN’S LIVES*, supra note 19, at 92.

<sup>22</sup> Aaron Mannes, “There is a Use for Violence in Our Movement”, *Tech Central* (2 Aug. 2005), available at <http://www.techcentralstation.com/080205C.html> (last visited 13 Aug. 2005).

the authoritarian nature of militant advocacy by quoting a founder of the Animal Liberation Press Office as stating:

I think there is a use for violence in our movement. And I think it can be an effective strategy. Not only is it morally acceptable. ... I don't think you'd have to kill -- assassinate -- too many vivisectioners before you would see a marked decrease in the amount of vivisection going on.<sup>23</sup>

Here we have the suggestion that the devoted activist would risk a lifetime of liberty in the name of Animal Liberation. The idea that one would offer oneself up as a willing soldier, pitted against the far mightier arms of government, ready to hurl one's body against the walls of a multi-billion dollar industry, willing to be trained as a killer if that's what's required, and ultimately prepared to walk into court and submit to jail, even death. The call is a deliberate provocation that best replicates itself by seeking out those who thrive on a feeling of self-importance when people are indeed provoked: I am reviled; therefore I am.

This willingness to see how far one can push one's rhetoric of hard-core activism becomes the modern equivalent of putting grease in one's hair and combing it into a pompadour. Our modern James Dean goes forth in style, keen to race fastest and nearest to the cliffs, a rebel without a cause. For the process of becoming militant takes on greater or at least more immediate significance to the activist than the cause itself.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the might-makes-right rhetoric betrays animal rights principles, and it simultaneously draws public attention to the threats posed by activists -- rather than those posed by human domination over nature and the use of animals to achieve it.

Twine notes that environmental politics can and does afford ample space for activists to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. (referring to "an August 2003 Animal Rights Conference in Los Angeles" where Animal Liberation Press Office spokesperson Jerry Vlasak's remarks were derived).

<sup>24</sup> As vegan activist Mickey Z. commented to me in a recent conversation, when animal advocates play the "more radical than thou game" the losers are the animals.

instead listen to, and advocate for, the feminist point of view. Still, Twine observes, the majority culture sees the environmentalist -- particularly the male vegetarian, and even more so the vegetarian who acknowledges empathy with other animals -- as a challenge to the status quo, incurring intense suspicion and possibly the kind of name-calling that one might hear in an Arnold Schwarzenegger speech. This is to be expected. Anyone advancing ideas for a healthier humanity will inevitably endure the release of psychic toxins built up over centuries of hierarchical thinking. The name-callers will tire as more activists grow willing to challenge convention.

Twine's suggestion that "environmentalism is a more fertile ground" for challenging hegemonic masculinity "than purely class politics" can be validated in North America and Britain, where the simple decision to eat a nut roast as a main course becomes a way of rejecting membership in the club of the manly. Rather than attempting to compensate for the loss by engaging in militant conduct, Twine's essay suggests, it is best to see that working where oppressions interconnect means working at their common root; ultimately, then, one's capacities are challenged infinitely more by declining to compensate. In Twine's view, the ecologically aware animal rights activist who is also willing to transcend gender restrictions helps to "make less likely the existence of heterosexist socialists, patriarchal eco-warriors and humanist feminists and so on."

We can also look at the egalitarian goals of ecofeminism as class politics, expanding the understanding of class. Monique Wittig wrote of the importance of defining oppression in materialist terms, "to make it evident that women are a class, which is to say that the category 'woman' as well as the category 'man' are political and economic categories not eternal ones." At the same time, Wittig viewed "women" as the class -- that is, a group defined in a social relationship with another -- wherein struggle is situated:

Our fight aims to suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle. Once the class "men" disappears, "women" as a class will disappear as well, for there are no slaves without masters. Our first task, it seems, is to always thoroughly dissociate "women" (the class within which we fight) and "woman," the myth.

For “woman” does not exist for us: it is only an imaginary foundation, while “women” is the product of a social relationship.

Wittig further wrote:

In order to be aware of being a class and to become a class we first have to kill the myth of “woman” including its most seductive aspects (I think about Virginia Woolf when she said that the first task of a woman writer is to kill “the angel in the house”). But to become a class we do not have to suppress our individual selves, and since no individual can be reduced to her/his oppression we are also confronted with the historical necessity of constituting ourselves as the individual subjects of our history as well... There is no possible fight for someone deprived of an identity, no internal motivation for fighting, since, although I can only fight with others, first I fight for myself.<sup>25</sup>

### **Replacing the Terminator with germinators**

In ecofeminism, individual women fight for themselves, noting that the same patriarchy which negates the individual personhood of animals does the same to women. Professor MacKinnon notes that “[m]en’s debates among themselves over what makes them distinctively human have long revolved around distinctions from women and animals”<sup>26</sup> and adds that “both women and animals have been status objects to be acquired and paraded by men to raise men’s status among men.”<sup>27</sup> This point holds true although the same model of domination can be and frequently is replicated in a hierarchical chain. For example, modern-day women may acquire animals to parade in shows. As MacKinnon puts the point, “People dominate animals; men dominate women.”<sup>28</sup> All ecofeminist activists, regardless of the gender assigned to them, are people who begin to “think emotionally” about their relationship to other conscious beings.

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<sup>25</sup> MONIQUE WITTIG, *THE STRAIGHT MIND AND OTHER ESSAYS*, “One Is Not Born A Woman” (book published 1992; essay dated 1981) at 15-16.

<sup>26</sup> MACKINNON, *WOMEN’S LIVES*, supra note 19, at 94.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. at 93.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. at 92.

Still, Twine says, there is a “persistent Western association of women with nature” and ecofeminism is “a strategic response” to this, wherein activists pick up on the association, yet consciously refuse to be demeaned by it. The legacy of Western dualisms, Twine observes, informs ideas of gender, race, class, and the separation of humanity from nature.<sup>29</sup> It constructs groups who are seen as amenable to being mastered by connecting them with the body and emotions, as distinct from reason or rationality. The prudent activist, Twine writes, would take care not to accept or perpetuate these constructed connections.

Yet ecofeminist groups in action do, to varying extents, re-enact dualistic gender -- perhaps most notably when outlining levels of acceptable roles that depend upon a definitive identification of an activist as either female or not. I would suggest here that one’s understanding of feminist principles, rather than one’s genitalia, identifies one as a feminist, and that the same holds true with regard to ecofeminism. To extrapolate from Ignatiev’s view of relinquishing whiteness, in order to dismantle oppression, the male activist can and must have a way to go beyond sympathy and to reach the point of identification. Male, in this framework, would be used as an adjective to describe a

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<sup>29</sup> There is a school of thought within animal advocacy that urges us to refer to animals by gendered pronouns, the rationale being that the term “it” implies inanimate status, or thinghood. Perhaps we need, ultimately, to embrace a different idea altogether -- one that brings ourselves closer to the inclusive “it” rather than the other way round. Sorting and identifying an animal by sex is not always possible or sensible, and yet again it sets standards that fit humans, whereas numerous beings within the great sphere of evidently conscious animals are able to reproduce themselves without binary sex, and some, biologists tell us, switch sexes during the course of their lives.

And the whole idea might limit human speech about each other as well. A writer, said Monique Wittig, “occupies a mental space in which sex is not the determining factor. It's absolutely necessary to have the freedom of that mental space to work in. Language allows it; it's a matter of constructing an ideal neutrality that is liberated from sexual definitions.” James Kirkup, “Monique Wittig: Radical Lesbian Writer Who Promoted Liberation from Sexual Definitions”, *The Independent* (9 Jan. 2003) (internal citations omitted; on file with author). Wittig used the linguistic idea in *L'Opopanax*, a book in which little girls refer to one another with the impersonal *on*. Ibid. Consistent with this view, Wittig refused to label people “women poets” or “women novelists” or “black women writers”. Ibid.

bundle of social habits in motion, a way of playing a role, a form of acting according to received ideas, rather than a noun that identifies the essence of one's personhood.

For some months before I met anyone else in the ecofeminist movement in real-world terms, I corresponded with a number of other ecofeminists almost daily through Internet discussion fora. After we met in the place cyberspace travellers call Real Life, one of the group told me that they had not really been sure what kind of role to suggest for me in the movement, because my messages bore no stylistic cues hinting at the gender of their author. Apparently, this had become the subject of some discussion in the group. I took this feedback as a sign that I was progressing nicely in the area of freeing my patterns of thinking and writing from the conventional roles. After all, haven't feminists taught the world that gender is a social construct; and, in contrast, isn't a discussion forum, honestly approached, a modern-day window to the soul? I'm not sure if the other members of the group saw matters in a similar light, but it was quite clear that the question had constituted, for my ecofeminist colleagues, an unsolved problem. Certain roles would be out of bounds for me if it turned out that I had received a male upbringing.

The unease I feel with this situation does not discount the experience of being a member of a socially disadvantaged group. The lessons of such experiences are profound. The experience is not hard to get, by the way, if one happens to find oneself born on Earth. Even if one happens to occupy the very pinnacle of high-value personhood, one can devalue one's currency by going to a foreign place and trying to earn one's living without papers. In the way I have explained above -- jogging, being heckled, and contemplating running as an animal in a metropolis -- experiencing oppression enables one to identify with the dominated group, and initiates a process of removing borders. The point is that *it can be done*. Furthermore, I would think it is the ecofeminist's role to encourage the doing of it, to leave a bit of space for the possibility. Seen in this light, it is presumptuous and even counterproductive to define someone by, and assign them into, one of two categories of roles based fundamentally on outer physical appearances -- which is, after all, just what the doctor ordered at the moment of our birth. To have undertaken to understand ecofeminist principles, to value them, and to put them into practice ought to

make one eligible for a membership in a movement that welcomes all on equal terms. I am fully aware that there will be risks, in a patriarchal society, in extending the benefit of the doubt unless or until one acts disrespectfully. Nevertheless, if we hope to ensure that feminist *principles* guide activism, it is my sincere hope that others will judge me, and would only wish to judge me, by what I have done with my bundle of experiences -- that is, by my character and not my chromosomes.

Our focus should be on the development of ecofeminism itself. There is no shortage of female activists in the ecology movement or the animal rights movement. There is no need, contrary to what is heard now and then, to “engage women” in these movements. There is, however, a terrible shortage of feminism, and a serious need to engage it in order to inform the combined areas.<sup>30</sup>

I hope that this view goes some way to answering Twine’s critical question:

“If the historical tradition in the West has been to associate women with nature, as ecofeminism suggests, where does that leave the relation between masculinity and nature?” For I think that if male activists are to “relate to nature in other than oppressive ways” it will mean shouldering more than an empathetic role and require identification with everyone and everything that was once held distant or actively subjugated. The duality of otherness cannot remain in place for this process to happen. This is not to suggest, of course, that the activist should be unmindful of the disadvantages and the increased burdens that patriarchal society has selectively imposed. No one need put up with a male activist who talks and writes about fine feminist principles so much and so long that the copying, the mail merging, the proofreading, the food preparation and the washing up are left to others. It should be practically taken as a given that the notable female activists in one’s midst have mainly come to that position after years of acting as support staff to others. These gifts of time are dues that ought to be paid to a movement

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<sup>30</sup> For an argument that a segment of the animal advocacy movement has promoted misogynistic views, see Geov Parrish, “Treating Women Like Meat” in WorkingForChange (Mar. 2002), available at <http://www.workingforchange.com/printitem.cfm?itemid=12999> (last visited 13 Aug. 2005).

on a fair basis, and fair should be read generously by the patriarchy's consistent beneficiaries.

That said, Twine rightly reminds us that patriarchy has also impoverished them. A male human being has become, in a sense, half a human being -- lacking the richness of emotion that could have informed a life in which gender roles did not obstruct a full range of creative being. Twine also mentions the false ideal of male invincibility -- that illusory concept sold to young people in films by Arnold Schwarzenegger -- that has imposed stress, fostered expectations of self-denial, and encouraged an ambivalence about caring for the male body. This can be seen most starkly in war, where the soldier is expected to accept injury as a badge of virtue rather than a senseless mutilation. Thus, Twine's suggestion that ecofeminist activism encourages "confessing male physical and emotional vulnerability and easing the stress and illness that goes with its denial" can be seen as a call to refute the role expectations that result in global stress induced by the politics of force. By offering a way to identify with the geese (other species), to identify with the inhabitants of Afghanistan or Iraq (foreign people), and to value the integrity of the environment (untamed places), ecofeminist politics guide those who embrace them to transcend the limits of what dangerously passes in a troubled mainstream for politics, entertainment, and making a living.

### **Putting the ethics back into bioethics**

Just a glimpse at the latest developments in the troubled mainstream will show the enormity of the task that lies before the activist who begins to think emotionally about the environment and all who live in it. The history of Western science's approach to nature, Twine says, is exemplified and expressed through methods that "abstract, observe, isolate, control and yet keep at a distance that being examined." The authority ascribed to such methods ensures an emphasis on the sense of observation or vision as "the paradigm for accumulating knowledge to the neglect of other senses such as hearing (listening)" as well as the devaluation of emotion. Twine's essay propiciantly views genetic engineering as "striving for some form of pseudo-procreative ability, which would only

appear to vindicate the charge of ‘womb envy’ sometimes directed towards hegemonic masculinity.”

In August 2005, scientists announced the first successful cloning of a dog, overseen by Woo Suk Hwang of Seoul National University in South Korea, who gained notoriety the year before by deriving stem cells from a cloned human embryo.<sup>31</sup> The cloned dog, the latest in a line of clones beginning with a sheep named Dolly, was carried by a surrogate mother and delivered by caesarean section.

The scene of the birth, as described in a news report, is emotionally sterile. Scientists laud the medical and veterinary potential of this “important piece of research” -- with no apparent concern about the individual subject, or for a sibling clone who lived only three weeks, then died of pneumonia. Laurie Zoloth, a professor of medical humanities, bioethics and religion, declares, “This sort of work is a necessary first step to creating human stem cell lines and using them.” Yet when asked if dog cloning might lead people to accept the idea of human cloning, Zoloth finds it “hard to imagine a way to set up the first safe, ethical experiment” as “[t]he rates of risk to the mother and to the baby would be unacceptable.”

Why do bioethicists so frequently allude to this imaginary ethical barrier between species?

A panel of 22 experts, including primatologists, stem cell researchers, lawyers and philosophers, spent over a year debating the wisdom of inserting human stem cells into monkey brains.<sup>32</sup> The group disagreed on whether such experiments, some already

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Roy Britt, “First Cloned Dog Raises Issues of Science, Ethics and Policy”, *LiveScience* (3 Aug. 2005; reporting on an article in the 4 Aug. 2005 issue of the journal *Nature*), available at [http://www.livescience.com/animalworld/050803\\_cloned\\_dog.html](http://www.livescience.com/animalworld/050803_cloned_dog.html) (last visited 13 Aug. 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Roy Britt, “Moral Debate: Procedure Risks Making Monkeys More Humanlike”, *LiveScience* (14 Jul. 2005; reporting on an article in the 15 Jul. issue of the journal *Science*), available at [http://www.livescience.com/animalworld/050714\\_monkeys\\_humans.html](http://www.livescience.com/animalworld/050714_monkeys_humans.html) (last visited 13 Aug. 2005).

underway, should proceed. Notably, the team's scientists admitted being unsure of how to ethically separate humans from other primates, and panel members were unable to come to a consensus about whether primates should be used for any invasive biomedical procedures. Still, citing Genesis, the panel's report states: "Humans are set apart by God as morally special and are given stewardship over other forms of life." Thus, rather than taking a clear stand in support of caution, the group recommends that such work needs oversight. This, although one of the panelists declared: "We need to know whether the human cells have an effect on cognition, but right now, the experts aren't even quite sure what 'normal' is for some of these primates."<sup>33</sup>

As I write this, I am reading reports as they appear through the lens of Internet media. I'll leave a more thorough check to other commentators or other days. But after reading these very brief accounts, I cannot help but recall some of the scientific debate over whether enslaving human beings was morally acceptable, and the way in which influential people drew on passages from Leviticus to perpetuate that grievous wrong. Were bioethics informed by ecofeminism at a stage where such information mattered, the decision-making process would differ radically from the current paradigm. The accent would be on an ethical framework that is not forged in service to a culture of domination. And the whole planet and all its life would not be seen as waiting around to be valued in terms of enriching a single species: man, the global hegemon.

### **Conclusion: An acknowledgement**

To whom can I speak today?  
There is no contented man,  
And that person who once walked with him no longer exists.  
To whom can I speak today?  
I am heavy-laden with trouble  
Through lack of an intimate friend.  
To whom can I speak today?

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<sup>33</sup> See *ibid.* (quoting Ruth Faden, director of the Phoebe R. Berman Bioethics Institute at Johns Hopkins University).

The wrong which roams the earth,  
There is no end to it.

- Unknown Egyptian, The Man Who was Tired of Life, c. 1990 B.C.

Human violence does not fit easily into compartments, nor are we likely to be relieved of it by viewing it in compartments. A violent culture systematically neglects the duty to teach its children respect for the autonomy of other conscious beings -- whether they be geese, wolves, or people outside the myriad borders we invent from culture to culture, age to age. A violent culture constantly looks for enemies. Where enemies aren't found, they are made. And then they must be controlled.

Any systematic form of domination and control perpetuates a paradigm that divides individuals into classes of oppressors and oppressed. It then claims this scheme is somehow natural and endless. Thus it is essential to unearth the commonalities, and approach them holistically, rather than dividing injustices and refusing to address certain forms until the worst prejudice is eradicated.<sup>34</sup> All forms of invidious discrimination represent thinking at its worst.

Ecofeminism is an acknowledgement that disrespect for and maltreatment of the environment, and all those with whom we share it, is perpetuated by the same thought process wherein human beings set out to dominate each other. Universally, the most prevalent paradigm is the domination of women by men. This domination is something we've all experienced from one category or another, and interrogating it can enable us to perceive the common denominator of all exploitive practices. This sense of connection is not easily accepted, and is systematically subverted by prevailing scientific, economic, and social values. Yet its promises are literally boundless. Its ideal will appeal to the most noble version of human nature, as it asks us to replace our time-worn and blood-stained hierarchical model with a more respectful and gentle worldview.

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<sup>34</sup> See supra note 18.

The journey begins with a re-assessment of our own natures, and a willingness to ask serious questions about the categories we've been living in. And the class "men" must disappear for "women" as a class to disappear as well, for when the masters are gone, there will be no slaves.