

Ivana Milojević

**THE HESITANT  
FEMINIST'S GUIDE  
TO THE FUTURE**



Tamkang University Press



*The Hesitant Feminist's Guide to the Future*

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Ivana Milojević

# THE HESITANT FEMINIST'S GUIDE TO THE FUTURE



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# 1

## FOREWORD

**A**t the beginning of 2024, I was invited to contribute to a project focused on women who engage in futures thinking and foresight. As a cornerstone of the project, a seminar was planned to celebrate International Women's Day. In preparation for the event, a vibrant exchange unfolded in a WhatsApp group. Participants, including myself, posed questions, suggested sessions, and explored shared concerns and interests. The following were some of the questions raised:

- Why do so many people, who agree with the principles of feminism, hesitate to identify themselves as feminists?
- What does feminism signify in 2024?
- How should we define it?
- Can individuals of genders other than women be feminists?
- Is feminism still relevant, or is it considered passé?
- Does the concept of feminism require rebranding?
- Should we discuss feminism in the singular or feminismS in the plural?
- Are we now closer to achieving the central feminist vision of an equitable future than ever before? Or perhaps as close as we've ever been? Or have we moved further apart?
- Has this envisioned future already materialized in some places, albeit with uneven distribution?
- What would the world look like if all genders have equal say – and

what implications would this shift have for our cities, economy, polity, diplomacy, environment, technologies, families, bodies, and minds?

In preparation for my own session, “Towards Feminist Futures (and Beyond),” I began to answer some of these questions. Granted, I have discussed some of these questions many times before. For example, Karen Hurley, Anne Jenkins, and I co-edited a special issue on “Feminist Futures” in 2008. In the introduction we noted that it had been nearly twenty years since journal *Futures* published another special issue on “Gender and Change,” co-edited by Magda Cordell McHale and Peggy Choong. McHale and Choong summarised the need for the 1989 special issue as follows:

“ *As we approach the end of the 20th century, we seem to be fraught with self-doubts and burdened with unmanaged problems ... Clearly, the crises we face today call for a different approach. The principles of ‘masculinity’ have shown themselves to be limited and deficient. A softer, more caring attitude is required [which] recognizes the quality and values of the entire human race.*<sup>1</sup> ”

Our opening paragraph, started with the commentary on the previous special issue and read as follows:

“ *Eighteen years on, the changes have increased in number and magnitude, but in some ways, and in regard to gender issues, ‘the more things changed the more they stayed the same.’ The above theme—of current crisis, the emergence of a new phase, and the potential for this new phase to be qualitatively and positively different—has been a constant in both futures and feminist literature.*<sup>2</sup> ”

In 2011, Ulrika Gunnarsson-Östling published a comprehensive overview titled “Gender in Futures: A Study of Gender and Feminist Papers Published in *Futures*, 1969-2009. She writes:

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<sup>1</sup> McHale, M. C., & Choong, P. (1989). Towards a renewed humanism. *Futures*, 21(1), pp. 3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Milojević, I., Hurley, K., & Jenkins, A. (2008). Introduction: Futures of feminism. *Futures*, 40(4), p. 313.



“Gender studies are closely linked to normative feminist research, striving for a world where men and women can function freely and fairly, which could be seen as a feminist future goal. However, this goal is often rather imprecise. Correspondingly, normative futures studies aim at reaching important targets, e.g., ecological sustainability. Although futures studies seldom have a gender perspective or feminist aim, attempts have been made to integrate a gender/feminist perspective into futures studies and some writers have done considerable works in this field.”<sup>3</sup>

With Åsa Svenfelt and Mattias Höjer, Gunnarsson-Östling published another article in 2012 titled “Participatory Methods for Creating Feminist Futures,” asserting:

“Gender perspectives in futures studies are rare and often sidelined, but there is also a feminist quest for feminist descriptions of the future.”<sup>4</sup>

This quest is not new. It has been around for decades if not centuries. When I entered the field of gender studies in the 1980s, I heard questions similar to those asked at the beginning of this Foreword. And when I entered the field of futures studies in the 1990s, I was fortunate to meet and be inspired by prominent women futurists such as Elise Boulding, Hazel Henderson, Magda McHale and Eleonora Masini, who theorised futures from ‘women’s ways of knowing’ in many ways. I also read and was inspired by the works of other women who previously engaged in futures thinking and foresight (and some still do), such as Patricia Aburdene, Frances Bartkowski, Martha Garrett, Linda Groff, Debora Halbert, Donna Haraway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Patricia Huckle, Riane Eisler, Kathy Ferguson, Donella Meadows, Margaret Mead, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Betty Reardon, Elisabet Sahtouris, Lucy Sargisson, Lynne Segal, Vandana Shiva, and many others.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gunnarsson-Östling, U. (2011). Gender in futures: A study of gender and feminist papers published in Futures, 1969–2009. *Futures*, 43(9), pp. 1029-1039.

<sup>4</sup> Gunnarsson-Östling, U., Svenfelt, Å., & Höjer, M. (2012). Participatory methods for creating feminist futures. *Futures*, 44(10), pp. 914-922.

<sup>5</sup> A list of some of those publications is provided at the end of this text.

There are historical and contextual reasons why gender-based perspectives in futures—and beyond—are mostly brought to light by women<sup>6</sup>. Nonetheless, building on the efforts of previous generations of authors and futurists, I've since worked with many female and male colleagues, who either explicitly or implicitly supported the work toward feminist futures<sup>7</sup>. As this number would be in dozens or perhaps even higher, I will not burden the readers with a list but would just like to acknowledge the existence of those individuals (and they would know who they are). At the same time, I would like to explicitly acknowledge the amazing support I received when preparing this text for publication: Lavonne Leong who graciously provided detailed feedback, Tatjana Konakov and Irena Durmišević who prepared it for publication, and Nur Anisah Abdullah, Sohail Inayatullah, and Jose Ramos, the editors of the Journal of Futures Studies monograph series who were instrumental in finding its current 'home.'

Going back to the 2024 project promoting the work of women futurists, what was to be a Power Point presentation or a couple of paragraphs for my session grew into this text. I've entitled it "The Hesitant Feminist's Guide to the Future" because time and again, I see a genuine desire among futures workshops participants and foresight practitioners to engage with feminist futures visions, followed by some reluctance to do so. Recently, I've run futures sessions focused on gender for a national police commission, a government ministry, a multilateral development organisation, a regional organisation, and an NGO. The question-and-answer format emerged as 'less threatening'. Thus, many chapters, but not all, are in the question-and-answer format. Of course, workshops and presentations are more dynamic and engaging than written text. Nonetheless, I hope this format will be helpful for communicating ideas through writing as well.

In the chapters that follow, I begin with a historical overview, because understanding our futures and presents—where we want to go and where we are—requires knowing where we have been. After all, the very distant ancestors of the modern futurists were not soothsayers but historians.<sup>8</sup> Historical context is important when investigating current

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<sup>6</sup> Milojević, I. (2018). Gender and the future: Reframing and empowerment. In R. Miller (Ed.), *Transforming the Futures: Anticipation in the 21st Century* (pp. 257-267). UNESCO.

<sup>7</sup> A detailed list of my previous publications, which reference these influences, is provided at the end of this text.

<sup>8</sup> Cornish, E. (1977). *The study of the future. An introduction to the art and science of understanding and shaping tomorrow's world*. World Future Society. p. 52

questioning of feminist relevance and how (or whether) it should be updated. I also touch upon contemporary debates on intersectionality, whether patriarchy as a system itself has a gender (or not), and whether it matters that requests for gender equality and gender equitable futures are framed as feminism in the first place. I conclude with a brief summary of the key points, scenarios, and visions by feminist futurists in general, and seven futurists in particular. At the very end, just for fun, there is a 'quiz' — a reflective checklist aimed at investigating one's own alignment with the principles of feminist futurists.

Certainly, this text is not complete, nor is it everything I'd like to say on the subject. For those wishing to know more, there is a list of recommended readings at the end. But I do hope this monograph will be useful for both seasoned feminist futurists as well as those sitting on the edge. At the very least, I hope that the following text will provide some food for thought, remind of historical context, and contribute to the future institutional memory.

Ivana Milojević  
08 March, 2024



*Image by Dall-E.*

## A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION: OF SPINSTERS AND MAN HATERS

In 1998, Kate Hughes wrote that “people are afraid of saying ‘feminism’ out loud, as if it will instantly turn them into a social leper.”<sup>9</sup> After all, as Scarlett Curtis sarcastically commented in 2018, “feminists don’t use makeup, shave their legs, like boys, or wear pink.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as research by Christina Scharff has found, one of the main reasons for repudiating feminism has been its association with “man-hating, lesbianism, or lack of femininity”<sup>11</sup>. The argument has also been made that feminism is polarising and divisive, as well as exclusionary – for example, by privileging one group of women (i.e., Western, white, middle/upper class, cisgender<sup>12</sup>, heterosexual, and able-bodied) over all others. When feminists refer to ‘women’s experiences,’ they thus refer to the experiences of this privileged group of women. Feminists have also

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<sup>9</sup> Hughes, K. (1998). *Everygirl's guide to feminism*. Longman. p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Curtis, S. (2018). *Feminists don't wear pink (and other lies)*. Penguin. p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Scharff, C. (2012). *Repudiating feminism: Young women in a neoliberal world*. Routledge. Available from: <https://www.routledge.com/Repudiating-Feminism-Young-Women-in-a-Neoliberal-World/Scharff/p/book/9781409410300>

<sup>12</sup> CIS, an abbreviation for ‘Cisgender,’ describes individuals whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth. Unlike transgender individuals, a CIS person’s gender corresponds directly to their biological sex. A CIS woman, therefore, is someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies culturally and socially as a woman. It is crucial to note that the term ‘cis’ pertains solely to gender identity and not to sexual orientation. Consequently, a cis woman may identify as homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, asexual, or pansexual.

been accused of “clinging to outdated notions about men and women despite the evidence that the world is now [allegedly] an egalitarian paradise.”<sup>13</sup> And not unfrequently, they are construed as responsible for the extra pressures women nowadays face, as well as for being power-hungry misers emasculating men and making their lives miserable.

Similar accusations have followed women's and feminist movements since their very beginnings. For example, suffragettes of the early 20th century were mercilessly mocked as man-hating, violent, and ugly spinsters. Their campaign for the right to vote was met with personal attacks, arrests, and all sorts of efforts to discredit them: “Artists created political cartoons that mocked suffragists. Religious leaders spoke out against women's political activism from the pulpit. Articles attacked women who took part in public life. Even without a coordinating institution, opposition to suffrage remained popular.”<sup>14</sup>



Image credit: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suffragists\\_on\\_the\\_warpath.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suffragists_on_the_warpath.jpg)

Those who opposed the suffragettes' activism and reasoning argued that most women did not want to vote, that they preferred to stay home

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<sup>13</sup> Redfern, C., & Aune, K. (2010). *Reclaiming the word: The new feminist movement*. Zed Books. p.3.

<sup>14</sup> Lange, A. (2015). National Association opposed to woman suffrage. Retrieved from: <https://www.crusadeforthetvote.org/naows-opposition>

and take care of the household and children, that women had no time to vote or stay updated on politics, that their votes would simply double what their husbands voted, and that voting would cost more without adding any additional value.<sup>15</sup> Some even argued that women in general “lacked the expertise or mental capacity to offer a useful opinion about political issues.”<sup>16</sup> Giving women the right to vote would therefore mean the end of family and society, and was thus to be avoided at all costs. These arguments were commonly followed by personal attacks on women who lobbied for social change and gender-based equality. The cartoons of “ugly spinsters” who hated men but nonetheless emulated them were a common theme.

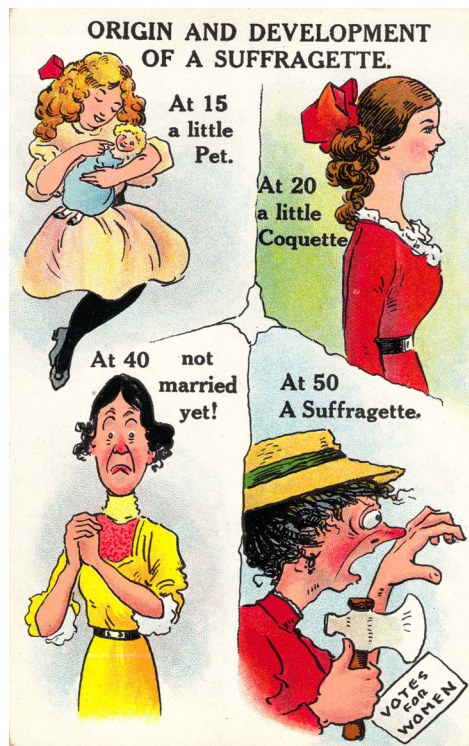


Image credit:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/njsmyth/12022025703/> Nancy Smyth CC BY-NC 2.0 Deed

[NOTE: Many more historical images mocking suffragette's can be seen here:  
<https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/suffragette-cartoon.html?sortBy=relevant>]

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<sup>15</sup> Lange, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Lange, *ibid.*

## THE TIMES THEY ARE CHANGING?

**F**ast forward to 2013, where a study by YouGov revealed that 19% of adults in Britain responded affirmatively to identifying as feminists, while simultaneously, 81% agreed that men and women should be equal in every way – having equal rights, status and treatment<sup>17</sup>. Another UK-based poll in 2017 found that only 8% of British adults supported traditional gender roles (e.g., men earning money and women staying at home), marking a significant shift from 48% in 1988.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, a 2018 YouGov survey in six European countries asked “Are you a feminist?”<sup>19</sup> The affirmative responses were as follows: 8% in Germany, 17% in Finland, 22% in Denmark, 29% in Norway, 33% in France, and 40% in Sweden.

Also in 2017, a broader, worldwide study by IPSOS/Statista found that more than half of respondents (58% out of 17,551 respondents, aged 16-64) identified as feminist, defined as “someone who advocates and

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<sup>17</sup> YouGov. (2013). Are you a feminist? Survey results. Retrieved from: [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/bz3pjikiw/YG-Archive-feminism-results-031013.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/bz3pjikiw/YG-Archive-feminism-results-031013.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Phillips, D., Curtice, J., Phillips, M., & Perry, J. (Eds.). (2018). *British social attitudes: The 35th report*. The National Centre for Social Research.

<sup>19</sup> YouGov. (2018). What the world thinks. Retrieved from: [https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus\\_uploads/document/0b1c4ebn2j/InternalResults\\_Feminism\\_Feb18\\_Toplines\\_w.pdf](https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/0b1c4ebn2j/InternalResults_Feminism_Feb18_Toplines_w.pdf)



supports equal opportunities for women.”<sup>20</sup> The figures per country were as follows: India (83%), China (74%), Italy (70%), South Africa (69%), France (65%), Spain (63%), Sweden (61%), United States (61%), Peru (60%), Australia (60%), Mexico (59%), Serbia (59%), Canada (59%), Great Britain (58%), Argentina (58%), Belgium (56%), Turkey (54%), Brazil (51%), South Korea (49%), Hungary (46%), Japan (42%), Russia (39%), and Germany (37%).



Image by Ivana Milojević via Canva.

Even more recently, a 2020 study in the US showed that over 60% of women described the term “feminist” as fitting them “very well” (19%) or “somewhat well” (42%)<sup>21</sup>. This figure varied based on age, education, ethnic background, and political affiliation. Perhaps the more surprising finding from this study is that the highest percentage of self-identified feminists is among the 18-29 age group (68%). Another somewhat surprising finding is that six out of ten men (60%) describe feminism as “empowering.” Less surprising, however, is the positive correlation with

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<sup>20</sup> Statista. (2017). Identifying as a feminist 2017, by country. The question asked was: “Would you define yourself as a feminist – someone who advocates and supports equal opportunities for women”. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/312161/define-self-feminist-advocates-supports-equal-opportunities-women/>

<sup>21</sup> Barroso, A. (2020). 61% of U.S. women say ‘feminist’ describes them well; many see feminism as empowering, polarizing. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/07/07/61-of-u-s-women-say-feminist-describes-them-well-many-see-feminism-as-empowering-polarizing/>

the level of education women have obtained (the highest among those with a BA degree or above, at 72%) and a left-leaning political affiliation (75% among Democrats or Democrats-leaning women vs. 42% among Republicans). Interestingly, fewer Black and Hispanic adults who participated in this study considered feminism “polarizing” (34% and 36% respectively) or “outdated” (24% and 26%) compared to white adults (49% for “polarizing” and 32% for “outdated”).

The high prevalence of feminist identification in the 18-29 age group suggests that the identification with the movement is on the rise, at least in the US. A similar conclusion was reached by UK-based researchers who argued that since the start of this millennium, a staggering number of feminist organisations and campaigning groups have formed in the UK<sup>22</sup>. Their conclusion is that feminism is a thriving movement today with a large number of people reclaiming feminism. Some 15 years since that research was published, the movement has only accelerated, and not just in the US and the UK.

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<sup>22</sup> Redfern & Aune, p. 10.

## FEMINISM VS GENDER EQUALITY?

**A**t the same time, there exists a significant discrepancy between those willing to identify as feminists and those agreeing with one of the core principles of feminism: gender equality. As previously mentioned, a 2013 YouGov study in Britain illustrated the pattern of a small percentage (19%) identifying as feminists, while 81% agreeing with the principle of gender equality.<sup>23</sup>

A more specific and broader inquiry into this issue was conducted in 2023. Specifically, adults in eight Western countries were asked three different questions to ascertain whether they identify as feminist.<sup>24</sup> One group, the “word only” group, was simply asked, “Are you a feminist?” Another group received the “dictionary definition” of feminism as “the belief that women should have the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way.” This “definition only” group was asked whether they thought men and women should have equal rights and status in society, and be treated equally in every way. The median positive response rate for the eight countries in the “word only” group was 32%, while in the “definition only” group, the positive response was 84%—a difference of 52%, simply based on the framing of the question!

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<sup>23</sup> YouGov. (2013). *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Morris, J. (2023). Who is a feminist in the West in 2023? That all depends on the question. Retrieved from: <https://yougov.co.uk/international/articles/45362-who-feminist-west-2023-all-depends-question>

Perhaps not surprisingly, when both the definition and the word were used in the question (“One definition of a feminist is someone who believes men and women should have equal rights and status in society, and be treated equally in every way. Are you a feminist?”), the median positive response was 62%. This data is consistent with the global data by IPSO/Statista (58%) which also used both word and definition in the framing of their question.

Why this discrepancy?

## 5 ARE YOU A FEMINIST?

I have spent approximately four decades learning from women's and feminist movements and thinkers. Additionally, I have taught in the fields of women's studies and, subsequently, gender studies for many years, including "Feminist Approaches to Futures Studies" elective.<sup>25</sup> Students frequently asked me how they should respond

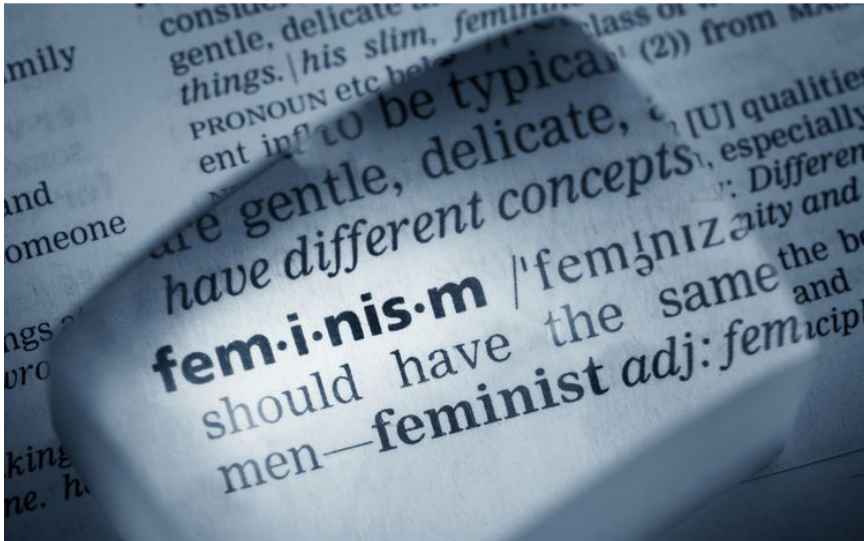


Image from Canva

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<sup>25</sup> To my knowledge, the elective I taught as a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Gender Studies, part of the Association of Centres for Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies and Research at the University of Novi Sad (from 2008 to 2017), remains the only one worldwide that explicitly links futures studies with feminism.

when questioned about identifying as feminists or whether they should accept such a label. My response was always consistent: inquire first about the questioner's understanding of feminism and how they define it.

Responding to a question with another question is critical in this context.

First, given the numerous interpretations and misinterpretations of feminism, it is important to understand what is meant by the term.

Second, as women's and feminist movements span centuries and have included many different thinkers and activists in various parts of the world, the meaning of the term is expectedly diverse and contextual.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, our perception and understanding of reality are usually predicated on power—individuals and social groups with more political and economic power often succeed in having definitional power as well.

Thus, to decide whether one is a feminist or not, having a shared understanding of feminism in conversations is helpful. It is also critical to understand the historical context of why feminism appeared in the first place.

## 6 WHY FEMINISM?

**F**eminism's roots are deep, originating from the recognition of pervasive issues within patriarchal societies that inherently devalue women. A major source of unrest that spurred the women's and feminist movements was social and cultural practices that barred women from fulfilling their basic needs solely because of their gender. Additionally, increasing dissent emerged against the notion that women's roles were solely justifiable within the context of human procreation, expecting women to remain silent and subservient to men. This was bolstered by discourses on the immutable 'nature of woman'.

To contextualize feminism within Western thought, it is insightful to consider the views on women held by some prominent philosophers and 'great thinkers' of the past. They are mentioned here because they helped form the discourse around gender within Western thought and are still a part of the general philosophical/social theory 'canon':

“...their (women's) nature is like that of children<sup>26</sup>... the perfecting of female embryos is inferior to that of male ones ... because females are weaker and colder in their nature; and we should look upon the female state as being as it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature.”<sup>27</sup> (Aristotle, c. 335-322 BCE)

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle. (1943). *Generation of animals* (A. L. Peck, Trans.). Harvard University Press. (Original work published 343 BCE) Chapter V, p. 165 Retrieved from <http://www.esp.org/books/aristotle/generation-of-animals/>

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle. Ibid. Chapters IV, VI – 775a, p. 459, p. 461

“It was necessary for woman to be made, as the Scripture says, as a “helper” to man; not, indeed, as a helpmate in other works, as some say, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works; but as a helper in the work of generation ... the male sex is not found in continual union with the female in perfect animals, but only at the time of coition ... but man is yet further ordered to a still nobler vital action, and that is intellectual operation ... so by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.”<sup>28</sup> (St. Thomas Aquinas, c. 1265-1274)



Image credit: *The Fall of Man* by Peter Paul Rubens, 1628–29.  
Image is in Public Domain.

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<sup>28</sup> Aquinas, T. (n.d.). *Summa theologiae* (Trans., Fathers of the English Dominican Province). Question 92, The Production of the Woman, L.92, C1. Retrieved from: [https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,\\_Thomas\\_Aquinas,\\_Summa\\_Theologiae\\_%255B1%255D,\\_EN.pdf](https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae_%255B1%255D,_EN.pdf)



“Women are capable of education, but they are not made for activities which demand a universal faculty such as the more advanced sciences, philosophy, and certain forms of artistic production. Women may have happy ideas, taste, and elegance, but they cannot attain to the ideal. The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling. When women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions. Women are educated — who knows how? — as it were by breathing in ideas, by living rather than by acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood, on the other hand, is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion.”<sup>29</sup> (Hegel, G.W.F., 1820) ”

“...man wishes woman to be peaceable: but in fact woman is ESSENTIALLY unpeaceable, like the cat ... When a woman has scholarly inclinations there is generally something wrong with her sexual nature ... Women want to become independent ... — this is one of the worst developments in Europe's general trend towards increasing ugliness. Just imagine what these clumsy attempts at female scientificity and self-disclosure will bring to light! Women have so much cause for shame; they contain so much that is pedantic, superficial, and schoolmarmish as well as narrow mindedly arrogant, presumptuous, and lacking in restraint (just think about their interactions with children!), all of which has been most successfully restrained and kept under control by their fear of men. .... We men wish that women would stop compromising themselves through enlightenment: just as male care and protection of women were at work when the church decreed: *mulier taceat in ecclesia!* [‘Woman should be silent in church.’] It was for women's own good, when Napoleon gave the all-too-eloquent Madame de Stael to understand: *mulier taceat in politicis!* [‘Woman should be silent about

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<sup>29</sup> Hegel, G. W. F. (1820). Philosophy of right. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/prfamily.h>

*politics.}] – and I think that it is a true friend of the ladies who calls to them today: mulier taceat de muliere! [‘Woman should be silent about woman’]<sup>30</sup> (Nietzsche, F. 1886)* ”

While such views no longer withstand contemporary scientific and philosophical scrutiny, it is crucial to acknowledge their historical role in shaping gender-based practices across various societies for centuries. Moreover, these perspectives continue to be a significant part of academic curricula, influencing successive generations. Although the majority today may not concur with the assertions about women made by Aristotle, Aquinas, Hegel, and Nietzsche, a minority still does. And, as the cyclical movement of ideas through history demonstrates, these views periodically resurface, often in camouflaged forms, adapted to contemporary times. For instance, consider the remarks made by influential author and speaker Jordan Peterson in one of his interviews:

“*The people who hold that our culture is an oppressive patriarchy, they don’t want to admit that the current hierarchy might be predicated on competence. ... It makes sense that a witch lives in a swamp. Yeah.*<sup>31</sup>”

Peterson's discourse includes numerous misogynistic assertions, exemplified by:

“*I think it is their [feminists’] unconscious wish for brutal male domination.*<sup>32</sup>”

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<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1886). Beyond good and evil, Chapter IV, Apophthegms and interludes. Retrieved from: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/nietzsche/1886/beyond-good-evil/ch04.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Bowles, N. (2018, May 18). Jordan Peterson, custodian of the patriarchy. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/style/jordan-peterson-12-rules-for-life.html>

<sup>32</sup> Jean Wilda. (n.d.). Jordan Peterson: Feminists have an “unconscious wish for brutal male domination” [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsdaU5Nc\\_-4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsdaU5Nc_-4) and Peterson, J. [@jordanbpeterson]. (n.d.). [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/jordanbpeterson/status/913533213301182465>



*A competent male and a downtrodden witch in a swamp. Image prompts by I.M. Image by Dall-E.*

“I don't think the men can control crazy women .... [because the] underlying threat of physicality... is forbidden in discourse with women.”<sup>33</sup>

“Here is the question: Can men and women work together in the workplace. ... Well, it's been happening for what, 40 years, and things are deteriorating very rapidly at the moment in terms of the relationships between men and women. ... Isn't wearing makeup in the workplace sexually provocative?”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Yun, T. (2017, October 8). Jordan Peterson: “I don't think that men can control crazy women.” *The Varsity*.  
<https://thevarsity.ca/2017/10/08/jordan-peterson-i-dont-think-that-men-can-control-crazy-women/>

<sup>34</sup> [@steinkobbe]. (n.d.). Wild Geerters post of Vice News Tonight, HBO clip of a Jordan Peterson interview [Tweet]. Twitter.  
<https://twitter.com/steinkobbe/status/96146152955210240>

“It is a very rare woman who at the age of 30 doesn't consider having a child her primary desire, and the ones that don't consider that, generally in my observation, there's something that isn't quite right in the way that they're constituted or looking at the world. Sometimes you get women who are truly non-maternal. You know, by temperament. They have a masculine temper, [are] disagreeable, they're not particularly compassionate.”<sup>35</sup>

“The idea that women were oppressed throughout history is an appalling theory.”<sup>36</sup>

Despite this, some male futurists praise Peterson's discourse. For example, for its 'deep impact' on the way we “envision, evaluate, and move into the future(s) ahead of us.”<sup>37</sup> Moreover, they argue that involving “such an influential figure” could enhance the discipline of futures and foresight. Conversely, Peterson's critiques from the “left tribe” are perceived by some as a breach of liberal principles. Apparently, it is not Peterson but the left-leaning groups (which includes feminists), who need reform for becoming overly moralistic, authoritarian, and intolerant.<sup>38</sup>

The argument extends to suggest that the ideological basis of Critical Futures Studies, aligning closely with left-wing ideology, predisposes the field toward bias and potentially dystopian outcomes. The implication is clear: to be deemed 'agreeable'—Peterson's term for 'ideal women'—women in futures studies must embrace or tolerate the “right tribe” views. These are the very same views that, once upon a time, told women they have “infantile minds” and are to be dependent on men.

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<sup>35</sup> Jordan Peterson. (n.d.). Women in high paying jobs [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nv2yvl4ld9Q>

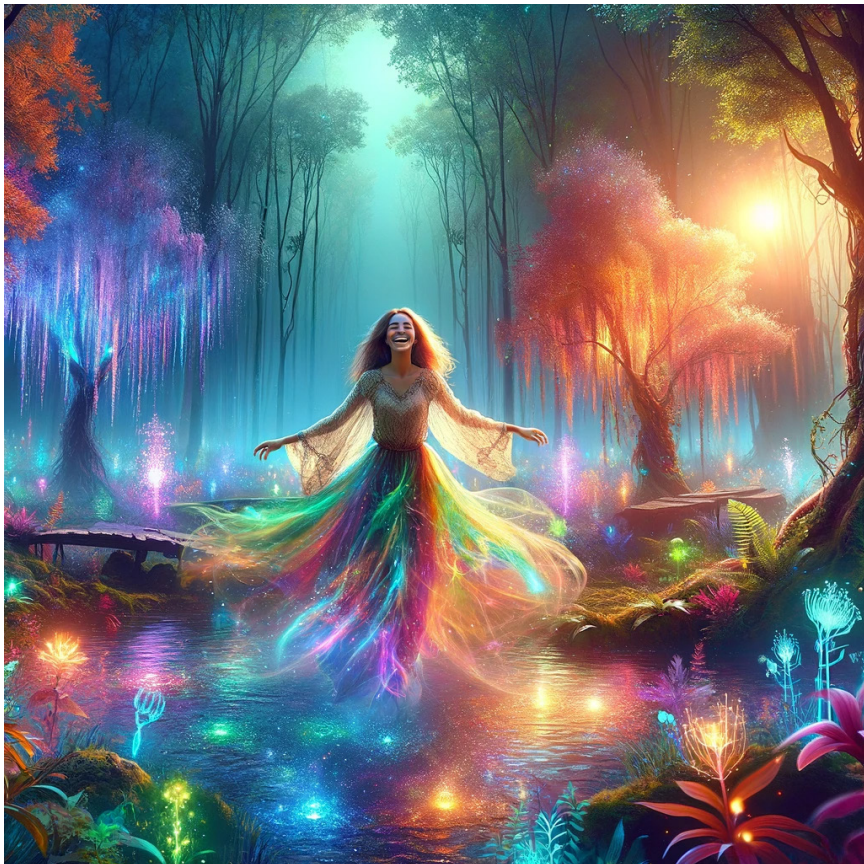
<sup>36</sup> McBride, J. (2017, November 10). The pronoun warrior. *Toronto Life*. <https://torontolife.com/city/u-t-professor-sparked-vicious-battle-gender-neutral-pronouns/>

<sup>37</sup> Fergnani, A. (2021, February 22). An explanation and expansion of Jordan Peterson's thought and its implications for our future(s). *Medium*. <https://medium.com/predict/an-explanation-and-expansion-of-jordan-petersons-thought-and-its-implications-for-our-future-s-c1a7c1e1a34a>

<sup>38</sup> Anthony, M. (2020). Web wide warfare. Part 1: The Blue Shadow. *Journal of Future Studies*, 24(4), pp. 35-50.

Additionally, these views denied women the power to decide what happens to their society, their community, and even to themselves, including to their own bodies.

Given such circumstances, being banished to a swamp might not be such a bad idea after all!



*A witch in a swamp, take two. Image prompts by I.M. Image by Dall-E.*

## 7 WHEN FEMINISM?

Throughout history, there have always been individual women who resisted the status assigned to them by patriarchy. As Rebecca West famously wrote in 1913<sup>39</sup> : “I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat, or a prostitute.” It is, therefore, perhaps “ridiculous to suggest that feminism simply ‘began’ at one point in history ... any time a woman resists patriarchy, she is practicing feminism.”<sup>40</sup>

However, beyond the strong, powerful, and rebellious women of the past, the collective attempt to address women’s oppression and subjugation within patriarchal societies began with feminism. And feminism itself started when women began to consciously “organize themselves on a scale large enough and effective enough to improve their situation.”<sup>41</sup>

At one level, given that feminism is a diverse collection of social theories and political movements, it has had many beginnings, phases, endings,

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<sup>39</sup> West, R. (1913). Mr Chesterton in hysterics: A study in prejudice. *The Clarion*. <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/social-democracy/clarion/1913/chesterton.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Milojević, I. (2008). [Discussion on the Wiki entry on feminism in 2006]. In Timing feminism, feminising time. *Futures*, 40(4), p. 329.

<sup>41</sup> Watkins, S. A., Rueda, M., & Rodriguez, M. (1994). *Introducing feminism*. Totem Books. p. 4.

revivals, and manifestations. Its roots are both ancient and modern, and its forms are as diverse as the geographical localities within which these various forms and phases appear.

But while historically and geographically feminist praxis exists almost everywhere (any time “patriarchy is resisted”)—feminist theorizing en masse originated in the 19th-20th century Western world, indeed most prominently within Western Europe and North America.



*Times have changed. Image prompts by I.M. Image by Dall-E.*

The beginnings of this political movement are usually traced to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, even though very few people identified as feminists back then. The actual term “feminism” was coined in France in the 1880s<sup>42</sup> as a

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<sup>42</sup> Offen, K. (1988). On the French origin of the words feminism and feminist. *Feminist Issues*, June 1988.  
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238363178>

combination of the French word for woman, femme, and -isme, which referred to social movement and political ideology at a time when many other “isms” originated<sup>43</sup>. It then “spread through European countries in the 1890s and to North and South America by 1910.”<sup>44</sup> However, from its very beginnings, the term was controversial and rarely widely popular. Some rejected it due to its radicalism and for trying to change “the natural order of things”. But even proponents of the movement and those who supported women’s emancipation during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries often rejected the term. Until the 1960s, among the most progressive social reformers, and even among suffragists and “women’s libbers”, feminist remained a pejorative term. This started to change with the significant expansion of Western women’s movement post 1960s, which revived the term feminism at the expense of women’s liberation terminology. Finally, it was in the 1980s that an umbrella usage of the term feminism took hold in Western cultures:

“*Anyone who challenged prevailing gender relations might now be called a feminist, whether or not they lived long before the coining of the term feminism, agreed with all the tenets of women’s liberation, or claimed the label.*”<sup>45</sup>

Since then, the words feminism and feminist throughout the Western world “connote the ideas that advocate the emancipation of women, the movements that have attempted to realize it, and the individuals who support these goals.”<sup>46</sup>

In social and historical terms, this development is, therefore, very recent. And as is the case with any novelty, resistance is to be expected.

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<sup>43</sup> Freedman, E. (2002). *No turning back: The history of feminism and the future of women*. Ballantine Books. p.3.

<sup>44</sup> Freedman, *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Freedman, 2002, p.5.

<sup>46</sup> Offen, *ibid.*



## 8 EMBRACING AND RESISTING (FEMINIST) CHANGE



*Myopia of Futures Fallacies. Image Credit: jeremy-lishner\_unsplash*

Social movements in general, and women's and feminist movements in particular, are focused on social change and thus are inherently oriented towards the future. This brings them into direct conflict with individuals and groups who want to maintain the status quo. Moreover, psychological and brain research consistently shows that for most people, change is hard. Humans (male, female, and beyond) are indeed creatures of habit. I have done research on Futures Fallacies, which explain why we collectively engage in patterns that make positive/

constructive social and individual change much harder than it needs to be.<sup>47</sup> For example, our imaginations of the future, by and large, do not seem to be particularly imaginative.<sup>48</sup> As decades of research by social psychologists and futurists have shown, images of the future and change are volatile and highly dependent on current events.<sup>49</sup> As a species, we seem to be more reactive than proactive. Fear of change and “future shock”<sup>50</sup> are also real. At the same time, we do have the ability to imagine and create novel ways of doing and being. Still, throughout history, this faculty seems to have been more prominent among a creative minority.

One way to understand this conflict inherent in each social and cultural change is via a futures method called the Futures Triangle. The method contextualises social change via three key dimensions.<sup>51</sup> The first dimension is the image of the future which pulls an individual, organization or society forward. The second dimension is the pushes of the present – quantitative drivers and trends that are changing the future. And finally, there are weights – the barriers to change and the imagined preferred future. Any image of a future that is different from the present situation will be in opposition to the weights of the past, as presented in the diagram below.

As a case study, let's take one idea for social change in the context of a patriarchal society. Patriarchy is commonly demarcated by the inequality of genders – patriarchy literally meaning “the rule of the

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<sup>47</sup> Milojević, I. (2020). Futures fallacies: Our common delusions when thinking about the future. *Journal of Futures Studies Perspectives*.

[https://jfsdigital.org/2020/07/18/future\\_fallacies/](https://jfsdigital.org/2020/07/18/future_fallacies/).

Milojević, I. (2020). Futures fallacies: What they are and what we can do about them. *Journal of Futures Studies*.

<https://jfsdigital.org/articles-and-essays/vol-25-no-4-june-2021/futures-fallacies-what-they-are-and-what-we-can-do-about-them/>.

Milojević, I. (2020). Mirror, mirror on the wall, who should I trust after all? Future in the age of conspiracy thinking. *UNESCO Futures of Education Ideas LAB*.

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/mirror-mirror-wall-who-should-i-trust-after-all-future-age-conspiracy-thinking>

<sup>48</sup> Gilbert, D. (2007). *Stumbling on happiness*. Vintage Books, Random House.

<sup>49</sup> Troumbley, R., Yim, S., & Frey, H. (2011, December 13-15). The future in 25 years, 1976-1989: Continuities, cycles, and novelties. [Presentation]. 21st WFSF World Conference, Global Higher Education: Reflection on the Past, Designing Sustainable Futures, Penang.

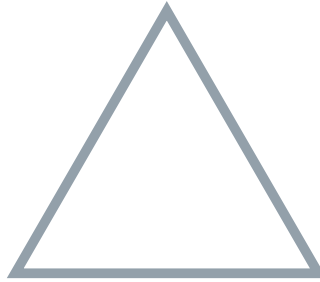
<sup>50</sup> Toffler, A. (1970). *Future shock*. Random House.

<sup>51</sup> Inayatullah, S. (2008). Six pillars: futures thinking for transforming. *Foresight*, 10, pp. 4-21.

## THE FUTURES TRIANGLE

What is the preferred vision?  
What are images of the future?  
What are motivations & inspirations?

### PULL OF THE FUTURE



### PUSHES OF THE PRESENT

What are the waves of change?  
What are the current trends?  
What are the emerging issues?

### WEIGHTS OF THE PAST

What are the barriers to change?  
What is the historical context?  
What are structural limitations?

*Adapted from Inayatullah (2008)*

father”, denoting the system in which (certain groups of) men hold positions of dominance and privilege. In simpler terms, patriarchy is a system in which men are seen as the more important gender and they have more say in how the affairs of a society are run. They are the norm, and “the subject”, while women are seen as “the other”<sup>52</sup>, the deviation from the norm. As patriarchy is a hierarchical system, “the other” is also seen as “less”. Consequently, the system ensured that there was no equal access to education, inheritance, the sphere of work, and politics for men and women. The norm and the subject were privileged, and the other was excluded – most men having the privilege to define themselves while women were defined by men. Concretely, and as regulated by the legal systems of the past, boys and men had access, women did not. Men themselves were differentiated in terms of access along the lines of class, ethnicity and even religion. Such gradations of discrimination, however, do not take away from the privilege or discrimination based on gender. This privilege or discrimination axis remains a historical fact. In any case, in that particular context, equality was the stated goal – a vision of the preferred future by those who wanted to disrupt the status quo.

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<sup>52</sup> Beauvoir, S. de. (1949). *The second sex*. Gallimard.

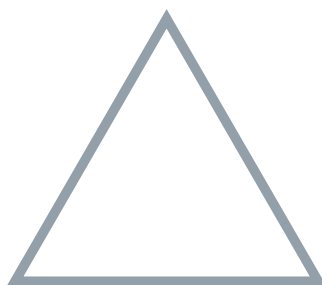
Such a vision – of gender equality – was outlined in pioneering and influential work by a creative minority, including authors such as Olympe de Gouges (*A Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen*, 1791), Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, 1790 and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 1792); and one of the first male authors making a case for gender equality, John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869, and with Harriet Taylor Mill, *The Enfranchisement of Women*, 1851).

In the simplest of terms, the pull of the future was a vision of gender equality. The push of the present, at least for the authors mentioned above, was the French Revolution of 1789 and ideals of liberty and equality stemming from the European Enlightenment. The weight of history was the so-called *ancien régime* (old regime), consisting of the monarchy, the privileges of the nobility, the political power of the Church, and patriarchy.

### THE FUTURES TRIANGLE 18<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> Century Feminism

The Desired Vision of Gender Equality

**PULL OF THE FUTURE**



**PUSHES OF THE PRESENT**

The European Enlightenment  
The French Revolution of 1789

**WEIGHTS OF THE PAST**

Ancien Régime  
(Old Regime)

It took a long while for these ideas to gain traction. The creative minority was, as is often the case, mocked, or (much) worse.



Despite this, the vision for an equitable future survived and thrived. For centuries, numerous individuals of all genders tried to imagine what that equality would actually look like. Depending on the degree of their radicalism, they would be labelled as dreamers, visionaries, revolutionaries, and/or utopians (interested in radical change), progressives (keener on adaptive change), or reformists, pragmatists, and/or moderates (focused on marginal change). These groups commonly disagree on whether certain social problems could be solved without changing the entire structure of the societies within which these problems reside or whether predominantly incremental, slower, piecemeal, pragmatic modifications are required. Additionally, these three approaches to social change – mostly about the speed and magnitude of envisioned changes – are always met with approaches that favour no change (promoted by traditionalists/conservatives) or even fancy a return to how things used to be “once upon a time” (reactionaries).

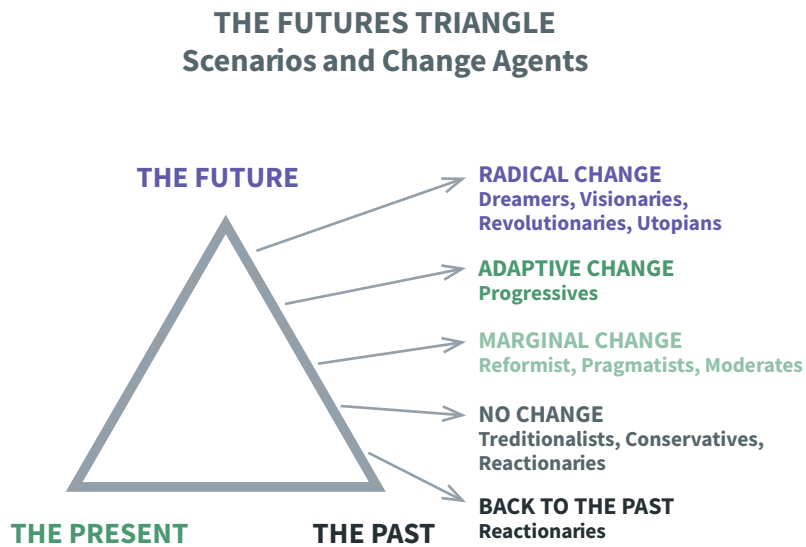
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<sup>53</sup> Image from:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Stuart\\_Mill#/media/File:John\\_Stuart\\_Mill,\\_Vanity\\_Fair,\\_1873-03-29.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Stuart_Mill#/media/File:John_Stuart_Mill,_Vanity_Fair,_1873-03-29.jpg)

<sup>54</sup> Image from:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympe\\_de\\_Gouges#/media/File:Olympe\\_gouges.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympe_de_Gouges#/media/File:Olympe_gouges.jpg)

The more radical the proposal for change is, the more likely it will be met by (strong) resistance. Any effort to enact social change will inevitably be met with conflict and attempts to discredit it.

The dynamics are presented in the diagram below.



Of course, it is entirely possible for a single person to be a visionary in one area and a traditionalist in another! This is another historical reason why many women who participated in the 1960s social change movements decided to create their own specific initiatives (i.e., “women’s” or “feminist” movements). They apparently grew tired of making coffee for the revolutionaries!

## WE CREATE OUR LANGUAGE, THEN THE LANGUAGE SHAPES US

**D**efinitional power – the role of language – plays a critical part in all this. Visionaries keen on radical change commonly start as a small minority. They usually begin by arguing for a need for significant and important changes and that the existing systems are inferior to their vision of the preferred future. Traditionalists and conservatives, on the other hand, are keen on social order and stable social interactions. They often take their local spatial and present temporal reality as a signifier of “how things always were.” Consequently, they perceive radicals as either hugely threatening or mildly irritating – depending on how significant a threat they perceive them to be – and thus label them as such. Given that the worldview radicals want to change is usually held by a majority in a society, it is the definitional power of the latter that ‘sticks.’ In other words, larger groups are better able to define terms based on their own framework and impose it on the majority in the society. Smaller groups, on the other hand, usually have terms defined for them by others.

To explain this in more concrete terms, let's look at feminist interventions in the (English) language since the mid-20th century. Given their vision of the future – gender equality – feminists proposed that this equality is reflected in language too. Moreover, they wanted language to stop reflecting the ownership of women by men, as it was in the past. Concretely, traditionally it was important to distinguish the marital status of women, to ascertain whom they legally belonged to. Mrs. has been a traditional title used for a married woman (belongs to her husband), while Miss was a traditional title used for an unmarried woman (belongs to her father). In other instances, both Mrs. and Miss were used to indicate higher social status. For example, Miss was a title used to distinguish a younger woman of higher class, as opposed to

those working in trades or as servants who were simply known by their first name.<sup>55</sup> As neither of these practices was in line with the vision of an equitable future, feminists proposed a very simple intervention within the English language. They introduced the general title Ms. to indicate female gender but not their marital status. Since then, a more radical proposition that indicates neither gender nor marital status has been introduced via the title Mx.

This very simple intervention has been met with a whole range of responses. Feminists themselves have largely embraced it. But many women did not appreciate this enthusiasm to match the language practices to the ideas of gender equality. Some felt that there were more important issues that needed to be addressed. Others felt that their status – as a married woman – was taken away. Yet others appreciated that they were still young or seen as young and preferred to keep the title for an unmarried woman. In some places, it has been fully embraced by professional women; in others, Ms. became a signifier for a divorcee or even for a woman of a certain age who never married – historically known as a “spinster”. Finally, as I’ve been told by one Australian school principal, women teachers in his school who use Ms. as a title in front of their name are “those who have a chip on their shoulder for being a female!”

Certainly, giving women a choice is yet another powerful feminist principle. Despite the accusations of feminists being labelled as “feminazis” (perhaps another patriarchal linguistic intervention?), various forms of feminism have commonly advocated for more, not less, freedom for all. These days, in many places (for administrative purposes in English), women are given the option of three titles – Miss, Mrs, or Ms. There are some other places that offer women the option of “virgin,” “widow,” or “divorcee” (i.e., in an administrative form which I personally had to fill in once). In any case, it is interesting to note that what started as an attempt by feminists to stop categorizing women based on their social and marital status has actually resulted in further diversification of women!

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<sup>55</sup> Erikson, A (2014) Mistress, Miss, Mrs or Ms: Untangling the shifting history of titles. University of Cambridge. Retrieved from: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/mistress-miss-mrs-or-ms-untangling-the-shifting-history-of-titles>





*Is this how a female teacher with a 'chip on her shoulder' would look like? Image prompts by I.M. Image by Dall-E.*

# 10

## MISS/MRS/MS/MX MEETS BEOWULF MEETS POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

It is not surprising that the original meaning of the title Ms. – equality between women and men regardless of marital status – has been largely obscured by various interventions influenced by the weight of the past (i.e., history and the social structure of patriarchy). A backlash to any novel idea is common and to be expected.

It is also to be expected that the backlash will be stronger when a new idea is more challenging of dominant systems of meaning. Which is why it is important to remember that new terminology is introduced all the time. Indeed, over time, languages change so much that they might even become unrecognisable to previous generations. For example, here is the original text of the poem Beowulf, written in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century CE and considered to be one of the foundational works of English literature:

“*Hwæt. We Gardena in geardagum, þeodcyninga, þrym gefrunon, hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon. Oft Scyld Scefing sceapena þreatum, monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah, egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð feasceaft funden, he þæs frofre gebad, weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah, oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymsittendra ofer hronrade hyran scolde, gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cyning. ....*”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Poetry Foundation. (n.d.). Beowulf (Old English version). Retrieved from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43521/beowulf-old-english-version>

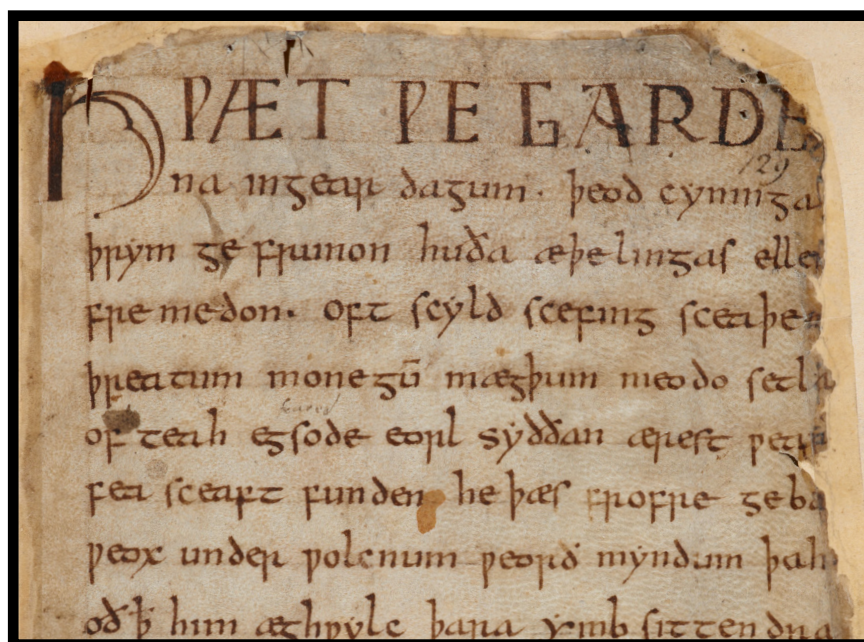


Image from the British Library. The image is in the Public Domain.<sup>57</sup>

Written in Old English, the poem requires translation into Modern English, as would be the case with any other foreign language. However, while languages undergo constant change, resistance to such change is typically lessened if the pace is slower and the evolution is perceived as occurring “organically” or spontaneously. The desire for language engineering is much smaller, unless, of course, it aligns with one’s own worldview and framework.

A case in point is the term “political correctness,” which has gained ground. Even though it was socially engineered by right-wing think tanks, becoming “one of the brilliant tools that the American Right developed in the mid-1980s as part of its demolition of American liberalism ... [&] fair societies which require universal rules asserting justice,”<sup>58</sup> the term has been embraced even by those on the left end of the political spectrum. Other terms such as “femi-nazis” or “cancel culture” are similar social engineering attempts to discredit whole

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<sup>57</sup> Image from:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf#/media/File:Beowulf\\_Cotton\\_MS\\_Vitellius\\_A\\_XV\\_f\\_132r.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beowulf#/media/File:Beowulf_Cotton_MS_Vitellius_A_XV_f_132r.jpg)

<sup>58</sup> Hutton, W. (2001, December 16). Words really are important, Mr Blunkett. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/dec/16/race.world>

political projects, in this case, of bringing more equality into our societies. Such social engineering pretends to be based on “common sense” and “neutrality”, but in effect, it allows for the conservative majority to validate their worldview and reinforce their own definitional power.

Which is why it is important to revert back to the definition of “political correctness” by those who promote linguistic practices that were termed as such by the American Right.

Political correctness [n]

“... the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against.”<sup>59</sup> ”

“Relating to or supporting broad social, political, and educational change, to redress historical injustices in matters such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. In practice, people attempting political correctness try to avoid offending others by taking measures or using language they perceive as safe. At the root of political correctness are compassion, respect, and empathy.”<sup>60</sup> ”

Which means that, and to turn things around: saying that we shouldn't be politically correct means allowing expression of views that a) insult people and b) do not attempt to redress historical injustices in matters such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

In sum, the social practice of what is often termed “political correctness” actually means refraining from insulting groups that already are socially discriminated against and vulnerable and that have historically experienced even more overt and worse forms of exploitation and discrimination (also known as structural violence) as well as direct violence. It is interesting that something which should be perceived as good, morally justifiable and desirable, manages to get reframed as something bad, and thus to be avoided and condemned.

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<sup>59</sup> Oxford Reference. (n.d.). Political. Retrieved from: <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100334599>

<sup>60</sup> University of Connecticut. (n.d.). Glossary. Political Correctness. *Office of Diversity and Inclusion*. Retrieved from: <https://office.diversity.uconn.edu/glossary/> <https://office.diversity.uconn.edu/glossary/>

# 11

## ARE YOU A FEMINIST (TAKE TWO)?

“Feminism has fought no wars. It has killed no opponents. It has set up no concentration camps, starved no enemies, practised no cruelties. Its battles have been for education, for the vote, for better working conditions ... for safety on the streets, for child care, for social welfare ... for rape crisis clinics, women's refuges, reforms in the laws. ... [If someone says], 'Oh, I'm not a feminist,' [I ask], 'Why? What's your problem?' (Dale Spender, 1993)<sup>61</sup>”

“Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. (bell hooks, 2000)<sup>62</sup>”

“And when, all those years ago, I looked the word up in the dictionary, it said: Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. ... My own definition of a feminist is a man or a woman who says, 'Yes there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better.' (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2014)<sup>63</sup>”

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<sup>61</sup> Spender, D. (1993, July/August). An alternative to Madonna: How to deal with the “I'm not a feminist, but...” *Ms.* 4(1). pp. 44-45. This is the widely circulated version of the following original quote: “I have a wonderful friend and mentor, Dr. Janet Irwin ... a medical doctor ... a commissioner on the Criminal Justice Commission ... [who] has a record of fighting for justice and equality; ... and [who] is proudly and publicly a feminist ... From her I have learned a great deal. For example, whenever she meets someone who says, “Oh, I'm not a feminist,” she smartly says: “Why? What is your problem?” Feminism has fought no wars ...” [the rest is as per the quote in the text].

<sup>62</sup> hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody*. Passionate politics. Pluto Press. p. viii.

<sup>63</sup> Adichie, C. N. (2014). *We should all be feminists*. Fourth Estate. pp. 47-48.

My personal understanding of feminism is that it is a social movement, ideology, theory, philosophy, worldview, and a way of life. It is also about women collectively finding their own voice based on their lived experience. Furthermore, it is about articulating a different set of values and priorities from those inherited from the patriarchal worldview. I have always seen it as an attempt to create a truly inclusive world that celebrates diversity and sees it as a source of enrichment rather than [superiority/] inferiority.<sup>64</sup> Other genders are welcome in this world, engaging in a dialogue that respectfully acknowledges all our differences. Despite some of its failures, it is at least well-intentioned – aiming to bring the highest level of wellbeing to as many people as possible, particularly women and girls. By and large, it also aims to learn from past mistakes.

When I discovered it in my teens, feminism gave me an enormous sense of freedom. It liberated me – at least cognitively (and up to a degree) – from the epistemological, psychological, and cultural violence imposed on me as a young woman. Feminism gave me ‘another pair of spectacles’ to put on, in order to both analyse the current (patriarchal) reality and envision alternative futures.



Image credit: Canva

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<sup>64</sup> Lorde, A. (1984) *Sister outsider*. Crossing Press.

# 12

## WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

**N**ow that I mentioned violence, I think that it is also important to define this term. To start with, violence is commonly understood and defined as “the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage or destroy”<sup>65</sup> or, in a more detailed way, as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”<sup>66</sup>

While the use of physical force with the intent to harm is certainly an example of violence, those who study and theorise violence and its alternative – nonviolence or peace – provide more sophisticated cognitive frames which I believe are very useful here. For example, the use of physical force that results in killing or injury is in peace studies/theory termed direct violence, but there are other, equally destructive types of violence.

The definition of violence I commonly use is by one of the founders of both futures and peace studies, Johan Galtung (though I slightly adapted his typology). Galtung defines violence as “*the avoidable impairment of*

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<sup>65</sup> Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Violence. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/violence>

<sup>66</sup> Krug, E., Dahlberg, L., Mercy, J., Zwi, A. B., & Lozano, R. (2002). *World report on violence and health*. World Health Organization.  
[https://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violenc/world\\_report/en/](https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violenc/world_report/en/)

*fundamental human needs*<sup>67</sup>, of which there are four main categories: basic human needs of (1) survival, (2) well-being, (3) identity/purpose and (4) freedom/fun. His definition also states that violence “lowers the degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible. The threat of violence is also violence.”<sup>68</sup> Galtung made a distinction between direct, structural and cultural violence, based on the mechanisms of how fundamental human needs are impaired. I use and expand his framework in the following table, adding psychological and epistemological violence to the mix, and specifically apply it to violence against women under the social system of patriarchy.

#### Definitions of different types of violence:

**Structural violence:** The numbers of avoidable deaths caused by the way large scale social, economic, and political structures are organised. Violence embedded in the systems, structures and institutions of our global society that cause preventable deaths, usually at a large scale.

**Cultural violence:** Imposition of values, norms and other aspects of culture that are used to justify or legitimate the use of direct or structural violence.

**Epistemological violence:** Imposition of a worldview that is foreign and that can be used to justify or legitimate the use of direct or structural violence.<sup>69</sup> A necessary ingredient and a precursor for other, more visible, forms of violence.

**Psychological violence:** May be characterised by carrying an implied threat of physical violence, or an attempt to intimidate or control the other person. Connected with emotional abuse which may be defined as those behaviours that are likely to include name-calling, negative judgments or attributions or actions [such as yelling] that result in causing the other person psychological pain or discomfort. Habits such as “criticizing, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, bribing (or rewarding to control).”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (3), pp. 167-191., pp. 167-191. Galtung, J. (1971). Structural and direct violence: A note on operationalization. *Journal of Peace Research*, 8(1), pp. 73-76. Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27(3), pp. 291-305. Galtung, J. (1993). Kulturelle Gewalt. *Der Bürger im Staat*, 43(2), p. 106. Galtung, J. (2010a). Peace, negative and positive. In N. J. Young (Ed.), *The Oxford international encyclopedia of peace* (pp. 352-356). Oxford University Press. Galtung, J. (2010b). Direct, structural, and cultural violence. In N. J. Young (Ed.), *The Oxford international encyclopedia of peace* (pp. 312-316). Oxford University Press.

<sup>68</sup> Galtung, *ibid*



Violence Typology:

Gender-Based Violence Against Women				
Type of Violence	Fundamental Human Needs and Their Negation/Avoidable Impairment			
	Survival  (Negation: Death)	Wellbeing  (Negation: Poverty, Illness)	Identity/ Purpose  (Negation: Alienation)	Freedom/Fun  (Negation: Oppression)
Direct	Intentional killing of women (e.g., femicide).	Intentional injury of women (e.g., rape, domestic violence injury, acid throwing, food binding, genital mutilation).	Forcing a particular form of femininity (e.g., actions by the morality police, distribution of revenge porn).	Social silencing and domestic imprisonment (e.g., banishment from the public sphere).
Structural	Women dying due to the lack of resources which are otherwise available (e.g., avoidable deaths in childbirth).	Women's health suffers due to the lack of resources which are otherwise available (e.g., obstetric fistula).	Lack of access to equal legal rights, education, health system, decision making and financial self-sustenance (e.g., social marginalisation, designation of "sex and beauty objects").	Lack of choices (e.g., forced pregnancy, forced marriage, system of male guardianship).
Cultural, epistemological, and psychological	Suicide due to misogyny or for failing to meet the ideal of desirable femininity (e.g., death from anorexia and other eating disorders). Accidental deaths as a result of wellbeing negation (e.g., due to overwork and exhaustion).	Physical and mental health disproportionately suffers (e.g., higher rates of chronic stress, anxiety, C-PTSD, depression).	No avenue for self-expression (e.g., stifling of creativity).	Gender-based stereotyping (e.g., having to play fixed gender-based roles).



*Image credit: Ratto delle Sabine [The Rape of the Sabine Women] by Giambologna, 1579-1583. Image is under CC BY-SA 3.0 license. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giambologna\\_raptodasabina.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giambologna_raptodasabina.jpg)*

All these types of violence are interconnected, they feed on each other. Epistemological violence, for example, is always a precondition for the explicit, unmediated use of direct violence. This is done via the “conceptual apparatuses, knowledge, consciousness, ideological orientations, and consensus or self-evidence.”<sup>71</sup> One example includes the process known as othering. The person is first seen as the other (i.e., a woman, not a human like the self), then as somehow deficient, lesser or malicious (i.e., ‘a wicked woman’), and thus as such ‘deserving’ of punishment (i.e., via various forms of disciplinary violence).

While both men and women experience violence, as both perpetrators and victims, gender-based violence is the type of violence they would not experience if they were of a different gender. For example, in wars, women may be raped while male civilians are killed. Both experience violence, the type of which is mediated differently due to their gender. ‘Innocence’ as a protective mechanism is also seen differently. For example, within the context of patriarchy and its twin brother militarism, all men between ages of 15-65 are by very definition soldiers. That is the implicit and at times explicit role ascribed to them. Therefore, their civilian status and the lack of any previous wrongdoing do not protect them from killings and genocide. Women’s protection and innocence, within the context of a patriarchal society, is by their “chastity.”<sup>72</sup>

Within the context of “the culture of violence called patriarchy”<sup>73</sup> women are shamed by being “too rebellious, independent, aggressive, and sexually active.” Such differential social psychology for men and women takes a diabolical turn when women are, in order to have the protection of killing removed, first raped. Rape is indeed a weapon of war, in many ways than one. It was through the efforts of women’s and feminist activism that this has finally been recognised as such.

Gender based violence also includes violence based on sexual orientation and gender-based identity. And yes, from these definitions and examples, it is evident that men suffer from gender-based violence too.

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<sup>69</sup> Gur-Ze’ev, I. (2001). Philosophy of peace education in a postmodern era. *Educational Theory*, 51(3), pp. 315-336.

<sup>70</sup> Glasser, W. (1999). *Choice theory: A new psychology of personal freedom*. HarperCollins Publishers.

<sup>71</sup> Gur-Ze’ev, *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Gilligan, J. (2001). *Preventing violence*. Thames & Hudson.

<sup>73</sup> Gilligan, p. 62.

# 13

## BEYOND PATRIARCHY: IS MATRIARCHY THE ALTERNATIVE?

In my thirty years of teaching university courses, or giving speeches and conducting workshops as a 'futurist', there was hardly a time when a concern about men did not accompany any discussion, even mention, of 'feminism'. Moreover, it is interesting, albeit disheartening, to observe how requests for women's empowerment and gender equality and equity are heard as demands for 'power over' and 'domination'. While that too can be seen as diabolical, within the context of a patriarchal worldview, it makes perfect sense. To understand what equality and equity mean, one must have a cognitive framework that sees beyond either-or and top-down relationships. If, on the other hand, there are only two genders, and if a hierarchical worldview underpins the reasoning, then the only alternative that is available is the one where instead of 'men on top' we have 'women on top'. Patriarchy is replaced by matriarchy, rather than with gender equality and partnership.

My forty years of studying feminism and working with women have yet to discover a significant desire for a matriarchal future. Moreover, historical research has failed to produce evidence of any substantial 'matriarchy' of the past. The legend of Amazons notwithstanding, there is no reliable historical evidence to prove 'patriarchy in reverse' – where men were disempowered in a similar manner women were/are within patriarchy. It is undeniable that women can kill and fight in wars for power and domination. But comprehensive historical accounts found only one society – the Dahomey Kingdom, from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries – where women warriors functioned over a long period and in more substantial numbers. This makes sense because

“society would have to be an outlier from the general pattern to have women warriors . . . [as] relatively peaceful societies would not need them and highly sexist societies would not tolerate them.”<sup>74</sup>



Image Source: Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam (CC0 1.0 Public Domain)  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Dahomey-women-warriors>

But there is no evidence whatsoever that the Dahomey Kingdom was a matriarchy. While this old Kingdom in present-day Benin has gained more attention recently in Marvel's Black Panther comics and movies and the 2022 film *The Woman King*, even these representations show no patriarchy in reverse. Moreover, the Kingdom of Dahomey was nothing to romanticise: it engaged in perpetual warfare, built its economy on conquest and slave labour, and was one of the major suppliers of African slaves within the Atlantic slave trade.

The best examples of matriarchy – a system of society or government ruled by a woman or women – we can come up with are societies which have women heads of state. There indeed were and still are such matriarchies, and yet, they fail to make a case for the existence of a social system in which most positions of authority and decision-making are primarily held by women. Matriarchy is also distinct from matrilineal, matrilocal and matrifocal societies and communities.

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<sup>74</sup> Goldstein, J. S. (2001). *War and gender: How gender shapes the war system and vice versa*. Cambridge University Press. p. 399.

Such societies and communities are more widely spread, but they refer to mothers having a more prominent role as to how ancestral lineage is assigned or who heads the families and kinship networks. Matriarchy – a governing of a social system by women – has, by and large, been absent from known history. Given that historical narratives have been deeply intertwined with a patriarchal worldview, such reinterpretation—creating alternative historical narratives—is critically important for the creation of alternative futures. According to our best evidence, pre-patriarchal societies were based on partnership rather than domination. In other words, they were not matriarchies but rather operated on partnership models.

More recently, at the UN 2022 World Summit out of 193 Member States, 26 had Women Heads of State or Government, women were 21 percent of the world's ministers, 26 percent of national parliamentarians, and 34 percent of elected seats of local government. Five countries had 50 percent or more women in parliament in single or lower houses: Rwanda (61 percent), Cuba (53 percent), Nicaragua (51 percent), Mexico (50 percent) and the United Arab Emirates (50 percent). Such “gender power order” led a prominent sociologist R. Connell to conclude that it is beyond doubt that “men dominating women” is “a structural fact, independent of whether men as individuals love or hate women, or believe in equality or abjection, and independent of whether women are currently pursuing change.”<sup>75</sup>



*President Joe Biden poses for a group photo with G7 leaders, Thursday, March 24, 2022, at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. Public Domain.  
<https://www.rawpixel.com/image/9647470/photo-image-person-public-domain-house>*

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<sup>75</sup> Connell, R. W. (2005). *Masculinities* (2nd ed.). Allen & Unwin. p. 82.

“What exists is possible,” is a statement often made by futurists Kenneth and Elise Boulding. Elise Boulding mostly used it to make a case for the existence of peaceful communities and societies and nonviolent conflict resolution. To turn this around, perhaps “what does not exist is not possible.” In other words, if there is scant evidence for reverse patriarchy, perhaps, despite some people’s imagination to the contrary, such a system is an impossibility. Of course, it is also possible that we can create what we can imagine. But why would we want to? And who would want to? Where are the feminists’ texts arguing for the creation of another system which, once again, suppresses half of the human population?

Whether matriarchy is possible or impossible is arguable. What is more important is to acknowledge the lack of feminist texts advocating for the creation of a true matriarchy and the lack of any political project, historically and now, toward a matriarchal future.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> For example, the following compilations can be consulted: Wagner, C. (Ed.). (1997, May-June). Women’s preferred futures [a collection of essays]. *The Futurist*; Ryan, M. J. (Ed.). (1998). *The fabric of the future: Women visionaries of today illuminate the path to tomorrow*. Conari Press; and Brodsky, A. & Kauder Nalebuff, R. (2015). *The feminist utopia project: Fifty-seven visions of a wildly better future*. Feminist Press at the City University of New York.

# 14

## DOES PATRIARCHY MOSTLY BENEFIT OR HURT MEN?

**N**ot only have feminists not argued that women should come to power and do to men what men used to do to women (and some still do), they tend to claim exactly the opposite. “Patriarchy has no gender,” argued bell hooks.<sup>77</sup> Like feminism, patriarchy is a worldview and a way of life that can be internalised and externalised by all genders. What these people internalise and externalise is the belief, often subconscious, that power, influence, and decision-making should be in the hands of men rather than equally distributed irrespective of gender. They also hold the belief that certain so-called ‘masculine traits’ (e.g., physical strength, rationality, emotional control, stoicism, risk-taking, assertiveness, competitiveness, independence, instrumentality, goal orientation, ability to plan and organize on a grand scale, innovation) are superior to certain so-called ‘feminine traits’ (e.g., vulnerability, emotional sensitivity, empathy, beauty, sensuality, collaboration, caring, kindness, agreeability, nurturing, gentleness, attentiveness, relationship orientation, (inter)dependence). This influences how society is organised and how resources are distributed. It also influences the public sphere and the sphere of work, including what counts as ‘productive’ labour that is to be financially compensated.

Given this prioritisation and the higher valuing of central gendered traits by patriarchal societies for centuries, women continue to better absorb positive ‘masculine’ traits than the other way around. This costs both (all) genders – women are overwhelmed with having to be everything

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<sup>77</sup> The New School News. (2014, October 7). Teaching to transgress: bell hooks returns to the new school.

<https://blogs.newschool.edu/news/2014/10/bellhooksteachingtotransgress/>.



and do everything; they live pressurised lives. Men, on the other hand, live with different types of pressures; they are given confusing messages as to how to be 'successful yet decent men' in modern society. And LGBTQ+ people get penalized for all sorts of 'transgressions'; they are marginalized or (much) worse.

Going back to men, as a social group, they indeed gain some privileges, in status, financial remuneration, and more influence in decision-making – something often intangible and termed a “patriarchal dividend,”<sup>78</sup> and described as an “invisible knapsack of unearned assets.”<sup>79</sup> But the price paid is also high. Given that patriarchy is a system that creates and enforces social inequality on a large scale, it would be hard to imagine that this system could be maintained without violence.<sup>80</sup> As is the case with gender-based violence against women, various forms of violence are disproportionately directed at, and enacted by, men.

Historical and statistical data show that humans of the male gender, or men, “are by far the principal perpetrators of rape, war, torture, incest, sexual abuse, sexualized murder, and genocide.”<sup>81</sup> This is because the very notion of patriarchal masculinity is defined as involving “the expectation, even the requirement, of violence.”<sup>82</sup> In this context, negotiation and nonviolent conflict resolution have often been equated with weakness and passivity, both seen as ‘feminine qualities.’ ‘Real men’ of androcracy (another term for patriarchy, by futurist Riane Eisler<sup>83</sup>) thus do not negotiate; they fight. They do not mediate; they serve justice. They do not compromise; they use violence to assert righteousness.

Moreover, the patriarchal mindset that is often internalised by both sexes also sees it as somehow more “appropriate” to kill a man than

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<sup>78</sup> Connell, R. W. (2009). *Gender in world perspective* (2nd ed.). Polity.

<sup>79</sup> McIntosh, P. (1989, July/August). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Peace and Freedom Magazine*, 10-12. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

<sup>80</sup> Connell, 2005, p. 83.

<sup>81</sup> Glass, C. (2012, January 10). Why men matter, part I (The bad news). <https://www.craigglass.org/?p=558>.

<sup>82</sup> Gilligan, p. 62.

<sup>83</sup> Eisler, R. (1987). *The chalice and the blade: Our history, our future*. HarperCollins Publishers. Eisler, R. (1997). Cultural shifts and technological phase changes: The patterns of history, the subtext of gender, and the choices for our future. In J. Galtung & S. Inayatullah (Eds.), *Macrohistory and macrohistorians* (pp. 141-151).

to kill a woman.<sup>84</sup> Even international humanitarian law has forsaken men, argues Kathleen Barry. For example, Article 3.1 of the 1949 United Nations Geneva Convention indirectly, yet nevertheless decisively, holds that “only those persons taking no active part in the hostilities . . . shall in all circumstances be treated humanely.”<sup>85</sup> Turning this around means that those engaged in hostilities are excluded from protection of their right to live or from being treated humanely, which also means that “the Geneva Conventions actually violate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which guarantees that ‘everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of persons.’”<sup>86</sup> Men in combat thus know that they are killable, legally, making them our “expendable lives,” Barry continues. So men are expected to uphold so-called hegemonic masculinities which are to dominate women, femininity and ‘other’ men, and sacrifice their lives to do so. In some situations, and parts of the world, men continue to literally die in order “to prove that they are ‘real’ men.”<sup>87</sup>



Image credit: <https://www.pickpik.com/police-violence-thinking-man-mounting-journalist-helmets-51496>

A disproportionate amount of physical, direct violence is conducted by men – numerous estimates put the figure at above 90%. This makes men predominant (direct) violence ‘subjects.’ Such subjects are required to take dominant positions and subordinate women, but they are also required to do the same to other, ‘weaker’ or ‘threatening’ men.

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<sup>84</sup> DeKeseredy, W. S., & Schwartz, M. D. (2005). Masculinities and interpersonal violence. In M. S. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. W. Connell (Eds.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* (pp. 353–366).

<sup>85</sup> Barry, K. (2010). *Unmaking war, remaking men*. Spinifex Press. p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> Barry, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> Barker, G. T. (2005). *Dying to be men: Youth, masculinity and social exclusion*. Routledge. p.2.

Paradoxically, this willingness to turn themselves and other men into winners or losers while competing for resources and power in general also makes them violence 'objects.' As already discussed, the patriarchal mindset considers each capable male over a certain age a soldier, a potential warrior, irrespective of a particular man's inclinations, level of military training, or even (in)ability to use weaponry effectively or access it. Patriarchal societies assign the role of fighting in wars to men and most commonly they are "not given any choice about the matter." As James Gilligan writes<sup>88</sup>:

“...if they refuse to treat other men as objects of violence, and thereby simultaneously become objects of those men's violence, they will be shamed and insulted (called cowards) and then turned into objects of their own army's violence. “Deserters” have traditionally been shot. And just as men are shamed for refusing to treat other men and themselves as violence-objects, they are honored for being willing to do so.”<sup>88</sup>”

In summary, this “expendability of violence objects – that is, of men, or more precisely men of ‘battle age’ – makes them ‘the most vulnerable and consistently targeted population group’ for violence, ‘through time and around the world today.’”<sup>89</sup> As always, epistemological, cultural, structural and direct violence go hand in hand. The dynamics of how this hurts men are summarised in the table below.

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<sup>88</sup> Gilligan, p. 59.

<sup>89</sup> Jones, A. (Ed.). (2006). *Men of the global south: A reader*. Zed Books. p. 201.

Gender Based Violence Against and By Men (Men as Violence “Subjects-Objects”)				
Violence Typology	Fundamental Human Needs and Their Negation/Avoidable Impairment			
	Survival  (Negation: Death)	Wellbeing  (Negation: Poverty, Illness)	Identity/ Purpose  (Negation: Alienation)	Freedom/Fun  (Negation: Oppression)
Direct	Men as predominant perpetrators and victims of direct physical violence.	Men as decision makers, wielding political and economic power that results in “injury, siege, sanctions or poverty.” <sup>90</sup>	Male use of violence to confirm male identity (e.g., hegemonic or ‘toxic’ masculinity).  Violence used in society against men who do not fit the ideal of dominant male identity.	Males as decision makers (judicial power) and executors (executive power) of those decisions in regards to “repression, imprisonment, expulsion and deportation.” <sup>91</sup>
Structural	Men-specific competition to control more resources and wield more power.  Deaths amongst men that result from social inequalities.	Men as decision makers, wielding political and economic power that results in exploitation of ‘others’ (social injustice, lack of opportunities, malnutrition, illness).	Acceptance of patriarchal ideology as the norm.  The ideology of the patriarchal family.	Marginalisation and fragmentation of oppressed minority groups.

<sup>90</sup> Galtung, 1993, 2010.

<sup>91</sup> Galtung, *ibid.*

Gender Based Violence Against and By Men (Men as Violence "Subjects-Objects")				
Violence Typology	Fundamental Human Needs and Their Negation/Avoidable Impairment			
	Survival  (Negation: Death)	Wellbeing  (Negation: Poverty, Illness)	Identity/Purpose  (Negation: Alienation)	Freedom/Fun  (Negation: Oppression)
Cultural, epistemological, and psychological	<p>Suicide as a result of not fitting into (or dropping out from) the ideal of hegemonic masculinity.</p> <p>Accidental deaths as a result of risky behaviours (e.g., road accidents, extreme sports).</p>	<p>Mental and overall health issues amongst men as a result of pressure to compete, achieve and/or due to perceived failure as a man.</p>	<p>Men's alienation from 'feminine' qualities.</p> <p>Epistemological and psychological violence used in society against men who do not fit the idea of dominant male identity. Internalised "inner patri-arch."<sup>92</sup></p>	<p>Lack of choices in alternative expression of manhood beyond hegemonic masculinity</p>

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<sup>92</sup> Stone, S. (1997). *The shadow king: The invisible force that holds women back*. Nataraj.

# 15

## WHAT ABOUT MEN? CAN THEY BE FEMINISTS?

In 1997, another female futurist and I organised an event during the World Futures Studies Federation Conference on Global Conversations in Brisbane, Australia. It was an impromptu session titled “Women and Futures”. Twenty to thirty women showed up. And one man. My colleague was visibly distressed. We started introductions, but there was unease in the room. The young man became ‘an elephant’ in the room. Finally, I named the issue and asked how people felt about it. The room was split. A small minority argued that it is important to have ‘women-only spaces’ where women felt safe to express their viewpoints. The majority were for inclusion. They saw no harm coming from this, arguably ‘agreeable’ young man. And then he spoke. He said that given the situation, he did not want to create a schism. After that, he stood up and left. The room was silent, we could almost cut the tension in the air. The group never recovered. And that was the end of it for numerous WFSF conferences that followed.<sup>93</sup>

I never had an opportunity to speak to that young man again and have never seen him since. My first instinct was ‘to console’ him. My second instinct was to create an inclusive process that would allow all genders to participate. My initial ‘naming of the issue’ was done with the assumption of all agreeing that this would be the case. Yet another

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<sup>93</sup> To my knowledge, only more recently, since 2015, has the World Futures Studies Federation reinstated the ‘Women and Futures’ Seminar. This initiative, led by Natalie Dian and Leena-Maija Laurén, is dedicated to Eleonora Barbieri Masini, “the grand dame of futures studies,” (<https://www/millennium.project.org/tibute-to-eleonora-barbieri-masini/>) and the former President of the World Futures Studies Federation. It has recently been renamed ‘Futures Sisters.’

colleague agreed with me vis-à-vis the inclusivity principle and said that it was great I spoke, despite this being a contentious issue. And then she asked the question of why such sentiment by women like myself is often not reciprocated? Why was there confusion of who 'women' were in the first place? And how many exclusively men's groups crashed because a woman did not feel welcome?

In any case, all this reinforced my already held view that I should more explicitly work in the area of 'feminist futures' rather than 'women and the future'.

The concept of feminist futures as opposed to focusing merely on women and the future aligns with my long-standing belief, reinforcing the notion that feminism transcends gender boundaries. bell hooks eloquently stated, "Patriarchy has no gender;" this principle is equally applicable to feminism. This worldview and political endeavour can be embraced and propagated by individuals of any gender. Given that women can adopt ideologies, perspectives, and practices initiated and promulgated by men, it begs the question: why can't men equally identify with and champion feminist ideals? Just as women can subscribe to diverse philosophical and ideological stances—such as Christianity, Buddhism, Marxism, or Foucauldian thought—so too can men be feminists.

Crucially, these stances should not automatically be perceived as excluding other groups. Rather, they represent a set of values and beliefs that are universally applicable and designed to inform a broader, more inclusive perspective. This universality underscores feminism's foundational goal: to advocate for equity and justice across all divides, thereby enriching our collective human experience. At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge the longstanding issue of 'mansplaining,' which concerns some women and feminists. The simple solution to this issue is to engage respectfully and focus on self-reflection regarding one's own gender, rather than attempting to define reality for others. Another solution is to engage with at least a small section of the vast body of feminist theorizing about the future and beyond.

Going back to the 1997 incident, here too some historical context is relevant. bell hooks further clarifies that the feminist movement initially attracted numerous women who had endured trauma and sought refuge and emancipation from their oppressive experiences. They entered the movement traumatised by the damage they previously suffered at the hands of men. Their pursuit of safe spaces was occasionally marred by exclusionary practices, sidelining men as perceived inherent threats.

But while understandable, this stance could unfortunately and inadvertently perpetuate the very structures feminism aims to dismantle. In retrospect, a more explicit 'invitation' should have been placed under the "women and futures" workshop title in 1997. We should have clarified way ahead of time whether this was an inclusive ("all genders invited"), "women-only," or "for those who identify as women" event.

Moreover, the feminist movement has witnessed instances where its core principles were compromised by its adherents. A notable example is the contention surrounding the immutability of sex assigned at birth, which has recently given rise to the term 'TERF' (Trans-exclusionary Radical Feminism). This ideology contradicts the feminist objective of dismantling binary gender norms, ironically entrenching the movement in the same dualistic thinking it seeks to eradicate.

While acknowledging genuine fears regarding the loss of one's gender identity and safety from male violence, it is important to note that the notion of the 'performativity of gender' has been at the core of feminist thinking for a very long time.<sup>94</sup> In other words, the ways people express their gender can vary greatly across different cultures and historical periods. Such diversity shows that there are many possible ways to experience and express gender, which can lead to a wide range of gender identities in the future. This diversity not only enriches our understanding but also provides more freedom and choice in how individuals express their gender and what they do with their own bodies—another crucial feminist principle.

Granted, some essentialist thinking about gender—related to the biological sex assigned at birth—obviously remains. However, dismantling such essentialism and naturalism has been a key feminist objective, as these perspectives have historically been used to oppress and discriminate against women. And so, while perhaps well-meaning, some 'TERF' initiatives are, in my view, misguided.

The movement has also been challenged by individuals seeking to leverage feminism for personal gain, further complicating its objectives and inclusivity. The phrase 'You are not like all the other girls,' prevalent in romantic narratives, introduces an additional layer of division, misappropriating notions of 'girl power' and 'women power' into

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<sup>94</sup> Beauvoir, S. de. (1949). *The second sex*. Gallimard; Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4): 519-31, and Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

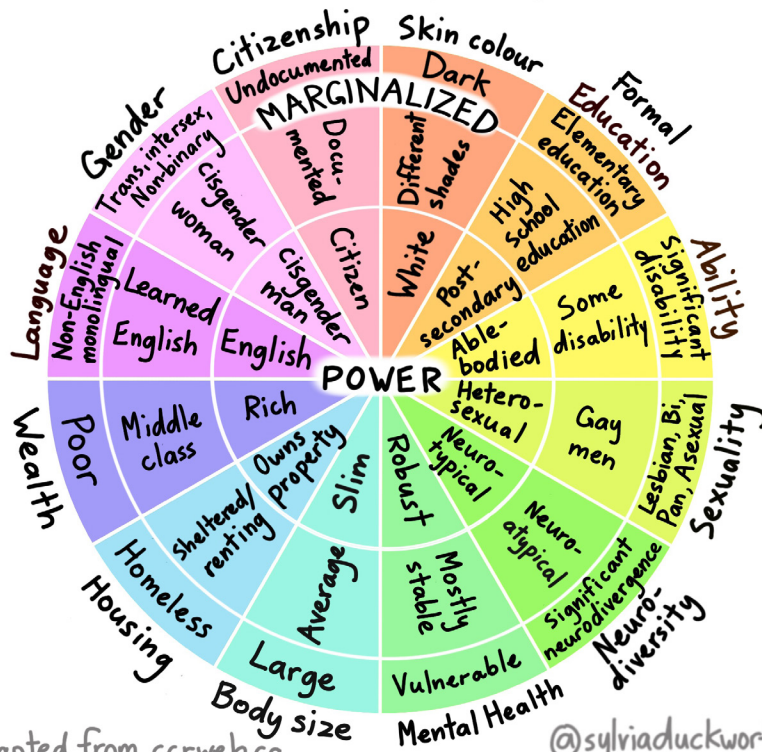


a paradigm of dominance over others, deviating significantly from feminist ideals.

Today, it is crucial to recognize that power dynamics and societal positioning are not solely determined by one identity marker. Contemporary discussions increasingly encompass a myriad of identity aspects, including sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, physical abilities, neurodiversity, body size, socioeconomic status, language, religious beliefs, mental and physical health, age, and education, among others. This broader understanding of privilege and marginalization underscores the complexity of social hierarchies and the multifaceted nature of feminism itself.

There have been significant attempts to visually present the multiplicity of identity markers and life situations as they relate to power and privilege, or alternatively, to disadvantage and marginalization. One such summary is presented in the diagram below:

## WHEEL OF POWER/PRIVILEGE



Adapted from ccrweb.ca

@sylvia duckworth

Image credit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/sylvia duckworth/50500299716>  
CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 Deed

However, this broader understanding should not lead us into the practice of 'whataboutism' – the technique or practice in which a critical question regarding gender is met with a deflection to another issue concerning a different identity aspect. There are indeed women who are more powerful (politically, economically, socially, culturally) than some men, such as Angela Merkel compared to Anas Modamani.<sup>95</sup> However, the appropriate response to this is 'yes, and' rather than 'either, or'. Once again, fostering divisiveness is a tactic often employed by systems of thought that uphold various hierarchies. Egalitarian cognitive frameworks, including feminism, aspire to be supportive and inclusive. The existence of other forms of discrimination does not diminish the significance of gender as a key factor influencing the distribution of power and resources. This has been the case for millennia and across cultures, as it is today.

Indeed, recognizing the multifaceted nature of identity and power dynamics enriches the feminist discourse, challenging us to envisage a more inclusive and equitable future. Feminism's embrace of diverse perspectives, including those of men, is not only feasible but has been an ongoing process for decades. It is also imperative for the advancement of feminist ideals.

Undoubtedly, there exist alternatives to the hierarchical social systems apart from feminism, including but not limited to pacifism, egalitarianism, and humanism. In light of these alternatives, what remains the impetus for maintaining a commitment to feminism?

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<sup>95</sup> Ott, S. (2017, February 21). How a selfie with Merkel changed Syrian refugee's life. *Al Jazeera*.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/2/21/how-a-selfie-with-merkel-changed-syrian-refugees-life>

Oltermann, P. (2017, March 8). German court rules against Syrian refugee in Facebook case. *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/mar/07/anas-modamani-syrian-refugee-facebook>

# 16

## WHY (NOT) FEMINISM (TAKE TWO)?

*“Feminists should be shouted down, verbally humiliated, and hunted into oblivion.”*

*“Feminists are the plague of this world and they must be stopped.”<sup>96</sup>*



Image from <https://womenagainstfeminism.com/>

Despite widespread global support for the ideals underpinning feminism, there are various reasons why individuals feel uneasy about embracing feminism or opt out of identifying as feminists altogether.

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<sup>96</sup> Quotes from one of the numerous anti-feminist websites

Some of these reasons include:

- **Lack of Understanding:** The majority of people acquire knowledge about feminism “thirdhand;”<sup>97</sup> they haven’t read feminist literature, attended feminist talks, or engaged with feminist activists.
- **Resisting Labels:** Some individuals prefer not to be categorized or linked to any specific ideology, preferring to define themselves more broadly, for example, as human or spiritual beings.
- **Individual Identity:** Others prioritize their individuality and resist being seen primarily as members of a social group, particularly one defined by gender.
- **Comfort with Status Quo:** Certain individuals are content with existing gender arrangements and see no need for change, especially radical or transformative change.
- **Negative Experiences:** Some may have had negative encounters with individuals who identify as feminists, perceiving them as using feminist principles for personal gain or to belittle others.
- **Perception of Active Involvement:** There’s a belief among some that only those deeply involved in feminist activism deserve the label, which may deter those who aren’t engaged in formal activism.
- **Perceived Approval:** Some may believe they need official recognition or approval to call themselves feminists.
- **Gender and Other Stereotypes:** There’s a belief that men cannot be feminists or that feminism only serves the interests of privileged, abled, and heterosexual white women.
- **Avoiding Conflict:** Many wish to avoid controversy and friction, potential insults and ‘divisiveness’, fearing becoming targets of attacks or being labelled negatively.
- **Cultural and Ethnic Disconnect:** Individuals may not resonate with feminist narratives that originate from specific cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds.
- **Perceived Foreignness:** Some view feminism as foreign to their own cultural or social context.

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<sup>97</sup> hooks, p. vii

- **Disconnection with Traditional Feminism:** Those who don't resonate with traditional feminist activities such as marches, protests, or formal organizational memberships may feel estranged from the movement.
- **Perception of Achieving Equality:** Some believe that gender equality has already been achieved and that feminism is no longer necessary.<sup>98</sup>

Given all these reasons, alongside historical and ongoing backlash, it is actually surprising that so many people do consider themselves feminists!

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<sup>98</sup> Redfern, C., & Aune, K. (2010). *Reclaiming the word: The new feminist movement*. Zed Books. pp. 5-6.

## 17 BUT DOES IT MATTER IF THIS TERM IS USED AT ALL?

**A**t one level, it really does not matter what term is used if the core principles survive. Indeed, one of the reasons for feminist successes (e.g., equal rights legislation; return to the ownership of own bodies; reproductive rights; access to education, politics and paid work; shared housework and childcare; improvement of health services; targeted provision for survivors of gender-based violence; minimisation of gender gaps; and adoption of gender equality as one of the key development goals by the UN), has been the ability of feminism to continually update its terms of reference. Feminism has been shown to be resilient and able to reinvent itself. It has proven it has the ability to contextualise key principles based on local needs and context as well as contemporary issues and priorities. As Germaine Greer wrote, it is also important for each “generation to produce its own statement of problems and priorities,”<sup>99</sup> and many generations of women (men and beyond) have done that and continue to do so.

For example, as a response to the critique that feminism only represents the interests of white, middle-class and privileged women, a whole range of ‘adjectival feminisms’ mushroomed. This has been based on the work of numerous authors, activists, and groups identifying as Black feminists, Afro feminists, Indigenous feminists, postcolonial feminists, multicultural feminists, transnational feminists, Chicana feminists, Asian American feminists, Islamic feminists, and more recently, intersectional feminists. Other adjectival feminisms highlighted different strategies

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<sup>99</sup> Greer, G. (1999). *The whole woman*. Penguin. p. 1.

for change that they believe should be priorities, for example, liberal feminism, libertarian/individualist feminism, radical feminism, socialist/Marxist feminism, post-structural feminism, postmodern feminism, separatist feminism, anarchy-feminism, cultural feminism, sex-positive feminism, difference feminism, spiritual feminism, ecofeminism, cyberfeminism, transfeminism, and possibly more.

In addition to the adjectival feminisms, there were other attempts to 'rebrand' feminism as a whole, for example, by calling oneself and one's group "womynists" or "womanists" – as proposed by Alice Walker.<sup>100</sup> In addition to terms such as "Womanism"<sup>101</sup> and alternative spelling of a term woman as "womyn", terms such as "Stiwanism" (Social Transformation in Africa Including Women)<sup>102</sup>, as well as "wymyn" and "womxn"<sup>103</sup> have also been attempted. All these are yet to get mainstream traction. The term "sisters" has also been, and continues to be, in use.

Currently, the gender-neutral pronoun of "they" and "them" for individuals – i.e., the singular use of the third-person gender-neutral pronoun – seems to have garnered more support.<sup>104</sup> In many places (e.g., for administrative purposes in English), women are nowadays given an option between three titles – Miss, Mrs. or Ms. While it is ironic that this feminist language intervention was initially intended to stop the practice of diversifying women based on their social and marital status but only succeeded in diversifying them even more, it is also aligned with another powerful feminist principle of giving women choices.

In fact, the term feminism itself is a rebranded concept for "suffragettes" and "women's libbers." Interestingly enough, like feminists today, both

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<sup>100</sup> Walker, A. (1983). *In search of our mother's garden*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

<sup>101</sup> Wikipedia contributors. (n.d.). Womanism. In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved from :  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womanism>

<sup>102</sup> Wikipedia contributors. (n.d.). Molar Ogundipe. In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved [Date you accessed the article], from:  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molar\\_Ogundipe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Molar_Ogundipe)

<sup>103</sup> Wikipedia contributors. (n.d.). Womxn. In *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. Retrieved from:  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womxn>

<sup>104</sup> Saul, J. M. (2017, Fall). Feminism: Language. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from:  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/feminism-language/>

groups have also been portrayed by some individuals and some media as man-haters or deranged outcasts.<sup>105, 106</sup>

So perhaps no rebranding will help with this. As discussed previously, any attempt to challenge a long-standing social hierarchy, in which a particular Deity (or numerous Deities) or, alternatively, nature, have allegedly determined this is how things must be, will be met with resistance and backlash. This is because some people will be worried that they may lose their taken-for-granted privileges, while others may feel disempowered by the very mention of those privileges if they themselves are lacking them.<sup>107</sup>

But still, why the word feminist, asks Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie? “Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that?”<sup>108</sup> And then she answers her own question in the following way:

“Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general – but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded ... For centuries, the world divided human beings into two groups and then proceeded to exclude and oppress one group. It is only fair that the solution to the problem should acknowledge that.”<sup>109</sup> ”

I am in agreement with Adichie. I have yet to find a better alternative that directly targets patriarchal pathologies. But feminism has always been more than a “laundry list of women’s issues”<sup>110</sup>. Rather, it has been a movement which seeks “the reorganization of the world.”<sup>111</sup> There is no issue in this world that, directly or indirectly, fails to affect women.

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<sup>105</sup> Brownmiller, S. (1970, March 15). Sisterhood is powerful. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/15/archives/sisterhood-is-powerful-a-member-of-the-womens-liberation-movement.html>

<sup>106</sup> Adamson, N., Briskin, L., & McPhail, M. (1988). *Feminist organizing for change: The contemporary women’s movement in Canada*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>107</sup> Freedman, p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> Adichie, p. 41.

<sup>109</sup> Adichie, *ibid*.

<sup>110</sup> Bunch, C. (1981, September/October). Understanding feminist theory. *New Directions for Women*, 10(5), p. 8.

<sup>111</sup> Teresa Billington-Grieg (1911), cited in Tuttle, L. (1986). *Encyclopedia of feminism*. Longman. p. 108.



And as everything affects women, every issue is a women's issue and therefore there is a feminist perspective on every subject.<sup>112</sup>

For example, ecofeminists have persistently highlighted the correlation between gender dynamics and the devaluation of nature. Sherry Ortner, in her pivotal 1974 publication, posed the question, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?"<sup>113</sup>, setting the stage for subsequent ecofeminist arguments. These discussions have revealed profound links between the marginalization of women and the exploitation of the environment, both products of patriarchal devaluation. This association is argued to be rooted in the cultural conflation of women with nature, creating conceptual, symbolic, and linguistic intersections between feminist and ecological themes. Thus, integrating an ecological perspective into feminist theory and methodology, as well as incorporating a feminist viewpoint into ecological solutions, becomes imperative. In other words, there needs to be a fusion of feminist and ecological perspectives in both theory and practice. The goal is to rehabilitate the value attributed to women, femininity, and nature, facilitating healing for both our environment and humanity. This vision for the future advocates for a sustainable, ecological society that moves beyond anthropocentric and androcentric biases, ensuring the rights and well-being of all life forms are revered and protected.

Moreover, without the foundational contributions of feminism, the landscape of gender studies would be notably barren, lacking targeted programs for individuals of diverse genders—a concept distinguished from biological sex and nuanced by feminist thought. This absence would extend to the field of critical masculinity studies, precluding the emergence of vital concepts such as toxic masculinity, feminist masculinities, and alternative masculinities, alongside male-specific interventions designed to address various male-related issues.

Crucially, feminists have not just worked to 'interpret the patriarchal world in various ways.' The whole point has always been to change it for the better. Going back to the definition and dynamism of feminism, Donna Hawxhurst and Sue Morrow argue the following:<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Tuttle, L. (1986). *Encyclopedia of feminism*. Longman. p. 108

<sup>113</sup> Ortner, Sherry B. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture? In Rosaldo, M.Z. & Lamphere, L. (Eds), *Woman, culture, and society*. Stanford University Press. pp 68 - 87.

<sup>114</sup> Donna Hawxhurst and Sue Morrow (1984), cited in Tuttle, p. 107.

“Feminism has only working definitions since it is a dynamic, constantly changing ideology with many aspects including the personal, the political and the philosophical ... Feminism is a call to action ... It can never be simply a belief system. Without action, feminism is merely empty rhetoric which cancels itself out.”

Which brings us to the last question here, what is it that feminists want? What type of future do they desire?



Equiterra, where gender equality is real. Image Credit: UN Women/Ruby Taylor

# 18

## WHAT DO FEMINISTS (AND FEMINIST FUTURISTS) WANT?

**G**iven the many manifestations of feminism over many centuries, any attempt to codify the visions of feminist futures will fall short. Still, there are some common and recurring themes. I've presented and written about them in more detail since the early 1990s.<sup>115</sup> Here I summarise the key points.

1. Feminist futurists acknowledge the pervasive influence of gender. Not every issue is predominantly marked by the importance of gender. However, there is a recognition that it might be.
2. Feminist futurists acknowledge the possibility that the future has already been colonised by patriarchal imaginings. If and when this is deemed to be the case, two parallel projects need to happen. First, the project of critiquing and decolonising. And, second, the project of envisioning different, post-patriarchal futures.
3. Visions for feminist futures are multiple, both spatially and temporally context dependent. And yet there are some commonalities, the core of what makes these futures visions feminists. These visions generally include the following core elements:

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<sup>115</sup> A detailed list of these publications is provided at the end of this text.

- Gender fluidity
- Gender diversity
- Gender equality – in private and public spheres
- Equal opportunities for all genders
- Equal valuing of diverse genders and their perspectives/worldviews
- Freedom from gender-based stereotyping
- Freedom to construct one's own identity, gendered and otherwise
- Liberated bodies and minds
- Sexual freedom and choice
- Bodily autonomy
- More egalitarian societies overall
- More equitable and balanced distribution of power in general, and among genders in particular
- More peaceful societies overall
- Societies that take seriously and address all forms of violence, seeking to minimise them
- Freedom and equity for all social groups, especially those who were historically oppressed
- Empowerment of the most vulnerable

These visions crystallised since the 'Golden Era' of feminist visioning based on distinctively different 'women's ways of knowing', which started in the 1960s and culminated in the 1980s during the so-called second wave of feminism. Theoretically, this phase occurred after, and in response to, the second wave feminists' demands to go beyond early feminists' concerns with the inclusion of women into existing social arrangements, such as the right to vote, access education, inherit property, and gain employment, and change those very arrangements based on different values and priorities.

During and since that time, six prominent futurists – four female and two male – also offered some basic choices for our futures as well as what they considered (explicitly or implicitly) the preferred future. These choices and visions are based on diverse gendered arrangements. For a good measure, I add my own preferred vision at the end.



From power-over, in the direction of power-for, power-to, power-with, power-within and power-toward.

A shift from coercive power to the approach that focuses on enabling power to create positive change.

## 19 TAKING GENDER INTO ACCOUNT: SCENARIOS AND VISIONS BY SEVEN FUTURISTS

**E**lise Boulding articulated an image of the “gentle society” situated within a decentralized and demilitarized yet interconnected and interdependent world. While women are often the “fifth world” (poorest of the poor) and invisible, as the “underside” of history, Boulding believed that we are increasingly moving toward an androgynous society, which she alternatively called “the gentle society.” Elise Boulding imagined this society as an exciting and diverse place in which “each human being would reach a degree of individuation and creativity such as only a few achieve in our present society.”<sup>116</sup> Future androgynous humans might have a fluid definition of gender but for Boulding that is not the main issue; rather the issue will be whether: *“by institutionalizing opportunities for the education, training, and participation of women in every sector of society at every level of decision-making in every dimension of human activity, and extending to men the procreation-oriented education we now direct exclusively to women, we will set in motion a dialogic teaching-learning process between women and men that will enhance the human potentials of both.”*<sup>117</sup>

**Riane Eisler** has articulated her vision of a “partnership society” or “gylany.” She argues that throughout human history, two basic models for social and ideological organization have existed: androcracy (a dominator model) and gylany (a partnership model). According to Eisler, the partnership model existed in some prehistoric societies until it was

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<sup>116</sup> Boulding, E. (1977). *Women in the twentieth century world*. Sage Publications. p. 230.

<sup>117</sup> Boulding, *ibid.*

swept aside by androcratic and patriarchal societies. Androcracy has been the dominating model for millennia, but our era is characterized by a renewal of partnership wherein a strong movement towards more balanced types of social organization already exist. Eisler argues that transformation towards a partnership society is crucial for the survival of our species in the nuclear/electronic/biochemical age. In gylany, linking instead of ranking is the primary organizational principle, with *“neither half of humanity ... permanently ranked over the other, with both genders tending to be valued equally. The distinctive feature of this model is a way of structuring human relations – be they of men and women, or of different races, religions, and nations – in which diversity is not automatically equated with inferiority or superiority.”*<sup>118</sup>

**Pamela McCorduck and Nancy Ramsey** presented four scenarios on the topic of the Futures of Women for the 21st Century: Backlash; A Golden Age of Equality; Two Steps Forward, Two Steps Back; and Separate and Doing Fine, Thanks! A Golden Age of Equality is described as a time when notions of individual rights, the role of law, and personal privacy prevail in a globally integrated growth economy. The Golden Age of Equality scenario presents similar elements to the preferred futures by Eisler and Boulding. McCorduck and Ramsey write: *“... like biological diversity, cultural diversity is very valuable ... The nation-states remain relatively stable, and it has come to be widely held in the international community that war is not a sign of patriotism, but instead an irrational waste of resources ... Funds long used for defense and aggression are at least freed for peaceful uses. Environmental protection is universally acknowledged as a long-term economy even when it seems like a short-term expense. Communications thrive without impediment among the world's governments and people, encouraging nonconfrontational conflict resolution, a set of techniques that is beginning to be taught to schoolchildren as commonly as personal hygiene. ... A profound shift in consciousness has permitted both women and men to begin to think of women as different from, but not less than, men.”*<sup>119</sup>

**James Robertson** outlined five scenarios for our futures: BAU (business as usual); Disaster; Authoritarian Control; Hyper-Expansion (HE); and Sane, Humane, Ecological (SHE) Futures. SHE Future prioritises balance: *“balance within ourselves, balance between ourselves and other people, balance between people and nature. This is not a recipe*

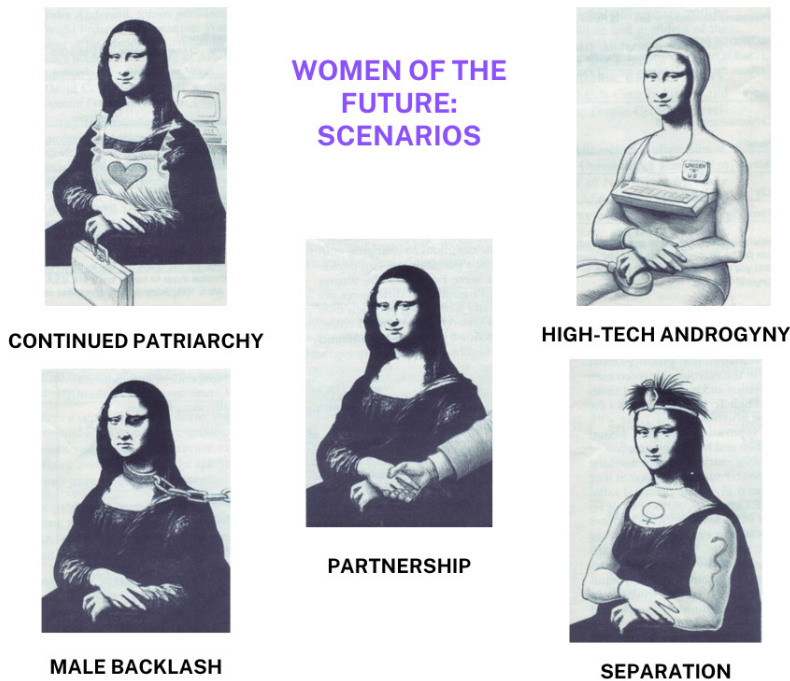
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<sup>118</sup> Eisler, 1997, p. 143.

<sup>119</sup> McCorduck, P., & Ramsey, N. (1996). *The futures of women: Scenarios for the 21st century*. Warner Books. p. 96.

*for no growth. But the crucial new frontiers for growth now are social and psychological, not technical and economic. The only realistic course is to give top priority to learning to live supportively with one another on our small and crowded planet. This will involve decentralisation, not further centralisation. That is the only way of organising that will work.”*<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, **Christopher Jones** proposed five scenarios: Continued Patriarchy, High-Tech Androgyny, Separation, Backlash, and Partnership. In the Partnership scenario: *“Neither males nor females dominate, but work together. Gender-based differences in labour become less pronounced, and women have full political and economic equality. Shared parenting exists in a variety of family forms, including extended, intergenerational groups.”*<sup>121</sup>



Credit: Images accompanying C. Jones article, *The Futurist*<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Robertson, J. (1980). *The sane alternative: A choice of futures*. River Basin Publishing. p. 13.

<sup>121</sup> Jones, C. (1996, May/June). Women of the future: Alternative scenarios. *The Futurist*. Retrieved from: <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Women+of+the+future%3A+alternative+scenarios.-a018334163>

<sup>122</sup> Jones, *ibid*



I myself have articulated scenarios for the future based on different gender arrangements. Below is the table that summarises them:

<b>Scenarios</b>	<b>Gender arrangements</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>Social arrangements</b>
Traditional patriarchal	Two genders. Strict male/female polarity.	Men and masculinity more valuable.	Hierarchical, oppressive to the marginalised.
Androgyny	One gender or genderless.	Equal but under the male norm.	Pressure to conform to the norm.
Multiple gender plurality	Multiple genders. Gender diversity, multiplicity.	Equal valuing of all genders.	Equalitarian, democratic, open societies, fluid.

Source: Milojević in Miller, 2018 <sup>123</sup>

I have argued that gender equity and celebration of multiple gender diversities are prerequisites for the creation of a better world. Why? Because:

“ *The development of a better world throughout the 21st century is directly premised on the re-making of traditional, and patriarchal gender identities. This is because such identities have been complicit in creating hierarchies of domination, of devaluing human life and nature – as these were seen more connected to women and thus ‘feminine’. When women are marginalised so are areas that are considered feminine and, in their domain, also. Re-valuing of nature goes hand in hand with revaluing of female gender and its contribution to the world. Other ‘invisible’ gender groups (i.e. third gender, queer, sexual minorities) also need to be (1) made visible and (2) equally valued. An emerging better world could be seen as consisting of societies with more individual freedom and choice as well as being based on empathetic approaches towards collective well-being. For this world to materialise in the future, traditional ‘feminine’ values (such as: caring, nurturing, nonviolence, support and empathy with others, intimacy, forgiveness, love, tenderness, vulnerability) need to be re-valued – re-considered as critically important for creation of such better world.*

<sup>123</sup> Milojević, I. (2018). Gender and the future: Reframing and empowerment. In R. Miller (Ed.), *Transforming the Futures: Anticipation in the 21st Century* (pp. 257-267). UNESCO.

*This re-evaluation and re-valuing can only happen within a framework that abandons patriarchal cognitive template. The closing of various gender gaps and work on gender equality is paramount if we are to make more informed choices for our future including more informed choices about our own gender-based identities and behaviours. This means that instead of being forced into certain gendered behaviours based on our physiology we need to create those behaviours based on our values. If the ending of inequality and development of social equity is one indicator by which a better world will be measured than achieving gender equity will be both a result as well as a condition for such world to happen.*

*The empowering of the female gender has never been just about benefiting women. Empowering of other marginalised genders is as well not just about empowering those sexual/gender minority groups. Rather, such efforts have always also been connected with the desire to create multitude of benefits for families, societies and the world as a whole. As we are facing major challenges related to the collapse of many human-human as well as human-nature relationships never before has the empowerment of females and femininity, and other marginalised gender identities, been more important. As the gender gap indicators continue to be improved so will hopefully all of ours' quality of life as well. Going beyond male female polarity and embracing equal value of all genders is the first step in that direction.*<sup>124</sup> ”

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<sup>124</sup> Milojević, I. (2012). Why the creation of a better world is promised on achieving gender equity and on celebrating multiple gender diversities. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 16(4), pp. 51-66.



*Credit: Millenium Tree, Image by Josephine Wall.*

## WHERE TO FROM THERE? GENTLE, PARTNERSHIP, DIVERSE AND SHE FUTURES

Over many centuries, feminists have produced a wealth of alternative visions for the future, alternatives that can indeed be “as real as our reality.”<sup>125</sup> The most important aspect of these visions is that alternatives to patriarchy can and do exist. This represents a significant break from traditional utopianism, wherein future societies tended to be organised in accordance with ‘human nature’, often locking women into their ‘natural’ roles and functions. The problem with this is that the doing of gender or gender performativity is made invisible. That is, people who evoke nature discourse miss “the vast diversity of gender patterns across cultures and down history ... [continuing to] imagine masculinity, femininity, and gender relations only in terms of their own local gender system.”<sup>126</sup>

Feminist eutopianism (imaginings of good and improved rather than perfect societies), on the other hand, questions not only dominant sexual ideology but gender itself. And it provides ways out of our current and most damaging predicaments, from chronic warfare to the climate emergency to growing class-based inequality, to name a few.

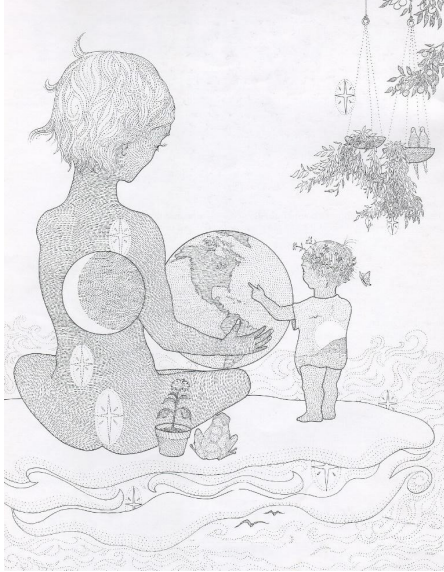
All utopian and eutopian visions, as previously seen via The Futures Triangle, have to negotiate reality with, well, reality. In this ongoing process, terms get developed, abandoned, found again, constructed, reconstructed, critiqued, rejected, continued, adopted, adapted,

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<sup>125</sup> Halbert, D. (1994). Feminist fabulation: Challenging the boundaries of fact and fiction. *The Manoa Journal of Fried and Half-Fried Ideas*. Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies.

<sup>126</sup> Connell, 2009, p. ix.

and so on. This is an ongoing process which is certain to continue. The terminology, as well as definitions and understanding of feminism will keep on evolving. There will be pendulum swings, as there have been in the past, and feminist solutions will be perceived more or less favourably. There will continue to be calls to abandon it, replace it, or, alternatively, reclaim it.



**SHE FUTURES:**  
The coming of a partnership, gentle, and life supporting society

**S**ane, spiritual, safe, smart, serene, satisfying

**H**umane, humorous, happy, harmonious, hybrid, humble, hospitable, honourable, hopeful, healthy

**E**cological, equitable, economically-balanced, enlightened, educated

*Credit: Illustration by Finger Prince, In Context: A quarterly of humane sustainable culture, no 18., 1988.*

As is always the case, any future is premised on actions by humans at present and dependent on their beliefs about which particular visions of the future are preferable for themselves and the groups to which they belong. Actions by various individuals, groups, communities and societies will remain diverse, conflicting, and pulling towards different futures – both equitable and inequitable. Feminism has outlined a different, and in my view, much better path for our future. It is up to each individual person and it is up to various communities and societies whether they wish to walk on that path and in that direction.

## CONCLUSION: ARE YOU A HESITANT FEMINIST FUTURIST?

This reflective checklist is a sequel to the discussion presented in *The Hesitant Feminist's Guide to the Future*. It aims to facilitate introspection, self-assessment and clearer understanding of one's alignment with feminist futurist principles:

1. Do you recognize the distinction between sex and gender?
2. Can you provide examples of how gender expressions differ across cultures and historical periods?
3. Do you perceive gender issues as critically important?
4. Do you recognize the persistence of gender-based discrimination?
5. Are you in favour of eradicating sexist oppression and exploitation?
6. Are you eager to discover and apply strategies to combat gender discrimination?
7. In your professional endeavours, do you account for the potential influence of gender?
8. Does your work incorporate diverse gender perspectives or worldviews?
9. Have you explored emerging gender-related issues?
10. Are you familiar with feminists' preferred visions of the future?
11. Have you engaged with works by feminist futurists?
12. Can you identify three futurists who have integrated gender considerations into their work?

**Assessment of Your Responses:**

**10 – 12 affirmative responses:**

You are a vanguard of feminist futures. Congratulations on leading the way!

**7 – 9 affirmative responses:**

You are an advocate for feminist futures. Congratulations on your valuable insights!

**4 – 6 affirmative responses:**

We value your participation and encourage you to explore the reasons behind your hesitancy.

**1 – 3 affirmative responses:**

Your exploration into feminist futures seems nascent. We invite you to deepen your understanding.

**No affirmative responses:**

Perhaps revisiting the fundamental texts on feminist futures will enrich your perspectives.

## A LIBRARY: SELECTED RESOURCES FOR BUILDING FEMINIST FUTURES

### SELECTED LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

BY WOMEN FUTURISTS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> C:

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Barbara Marx Hubbard (1998). Awakening our genius: The heroine's journey. In M. J. Ryan (Ed.), *The fabric of the future: Women visionaries of today illuminate the path to tomorrow* (pp. 9-22). Conari Press.

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Patricia Huckle (1983). Feminism: A catalyst for the future. In J. Zimmerman (Ed.), *The technological woman* (pp. 279-286). Praeger.

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Kathy Keeton (1985) *Women of tomorrow*. Lansdowne Press.

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Vandana Shiva (1993). *Monocultures of the mind: Perspectives on biodiversity and biotechnology*. Zed Books.

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## About the Author

Ivana Milojević is the co-founder and director of both Metafuture, a global think tank that employs action learning in futures studies, and Metafuture School, which provides courses and certifications in futures thinking and strategic foresight. Her academic career includes roles as a lecturer and professor at various universities, where she taught sociology, education, gender studies, futures studies, and peace and conflict studies. With over three decades of contribution to these fields, Dr. Milojević is the author of 150 publications, ranging from academic books to reports for governmental and multilateral organizations. For more information, visit Metafuture, Metafuture School, and Tales from Metafuture.



