

WHY GENDER JUSTICE & DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY?

FOEI
GENDER JUSTICE
& DISMANTLING
PATRIARCHY

JANUARY | 2020

REFLECTIONS AND STORIES FROM THE
FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION



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FRIENDS OF THE EARTH INTERNATIONAL IS THE WORLD'S LARGEST GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK WITH 73 MEMBER GROUPS AND OVER TWO MILLION MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS AROUND THE WORLD.

OUR VISION IS OF A PEACEFUL AND SUSTAINABLE WORLD BASED ON SOCIETIES LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE. WE ENVISION A SOCIETY OF INTERDEPENDENT PEOPLE LIVING IN DIGNITY, WHOLENESS AND FULFILMENT IN WHICH EQUITY AND HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS ARE REALISED. THIS WILL BE A SOCIETY BUILT UPON PEOPLES' SOVEREIGNTY AND PARTICIPATION. IT WILL BE FOUNDED ON SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, GENDER AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND BE FREE FROM ALL FORMS OF DOMINATION AND EXPLOITATION, SUCH AS NEOLIBERALISM, CORPORATE GLOBALISATION, NEOCOLONIALISM AND MILITARISM. WE BELIEVE THAT OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE WILL BE BETTER BECAUSE OF WHAT WE DO.

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WHY GENDER JUSTICE & DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY?

As a grassroots environmental and social justice federation, Friends of the Earth sees system change as crucial for the transformation of our societies. We recognise gender justice and the dismantling of patriarchy as key to achieving this transformative change.

In other words, we believe that our vision for social and environmental justice will become a reality only when we challenge and dismantle the systems of oppression which work together to concentrate power in our societies, through the exploitation of our bodies, work, territories and nature. These are systems of oppression founded on patriarchy, class, capitalism, racism, neocolonialism and heteronormativity.

We affirm grassroots, anti-capitalist feminism as an essential tool to achieving equality, gender justice and, ultimately, system change.

WHAT IS GRASSROOTS, ANTI-CAPITALIST FEMINISM?

Feminism is, at the same time, a political tool in the fight for equality and women's autonomy, a social movement that collectively takes up the fight against patriarchy and oppression, and an analysis of power and oppression.

Grassroots, anti-capitalist feminism has a class perspective, is constructed from the grassroots up, and is rooted in women's collective experiences from the local to the global and between rural and urban. It is relevant to all women and men, and representative of regional diversity and different realities.

The patriarchal system has transformed the ideology and language of feminism into a taboo and replaced it with the language of gender that was heavily institutionalised and depoliticised during the 1990s and 2000s. As FoEI, therefore, we defend the reclaiming of feminist, anti-patriarchal language as part of our anti-systemic discourse.

We believe that grassroots, anti-capitalist feminism has the possibility to transform all women's lives and everyone's lives and bring about system change, by dismantling patriarchy and the systems of oppression with which it is interlinked: racism, class oppression, neocolonialism and heteronormativity. A key step in this direction is the reorganisation of domestic and care work with shared responsibility between men and women and with State support.

SO HOW ABOUT ECOFEMINISM?

Ecofeminist analysis and practice help us to understand and give visibility to the parallel exploitation of, and violence against nature and women within the capitalist extractivist model — which appropriates our territories in the same manner as women's bodies and work. Within this dominant model, the time, energy and (re)productive capacities of women as a social group are considered infinite resources. The system relies upon them to “make up for” the destruction and privatisation of nature and the environmental, economic and other crises of capitalism.

Ecofeminism also values the spiritual connection and historical and activist relationship between women, their territories and nature. However, we take care not to explain this connection as being based on the “natural” role of women as creators and carers of life in urban and rural spaces — such an analysis can and is used to legitimise the sexual division of labour by essentialising women's reproductive biology.

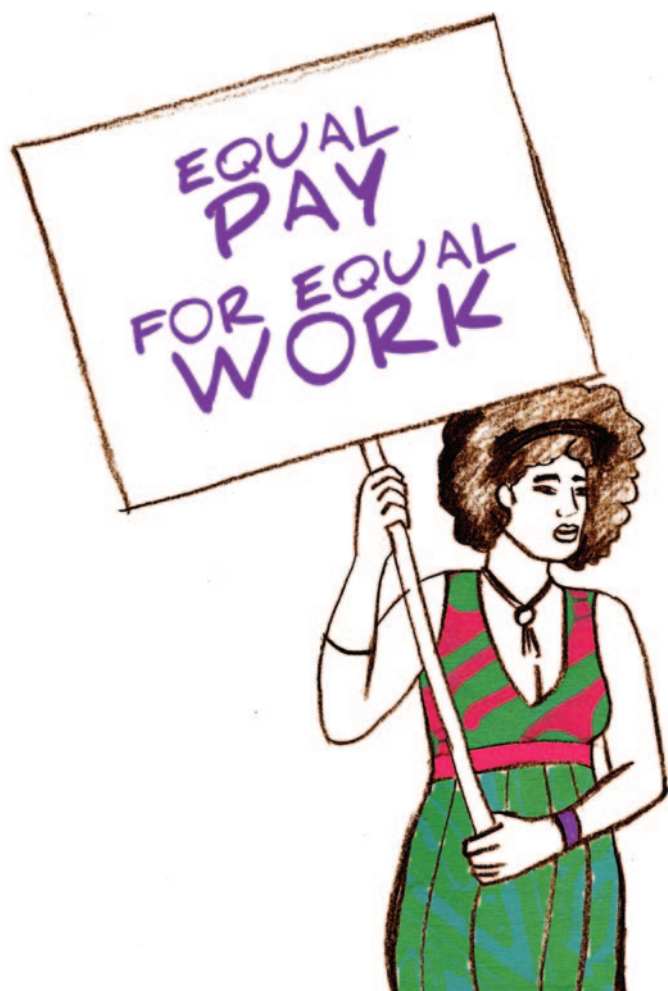


WHAT IS GENDER JUSTICE?

Gender justice refers to a world where everybody enjoys autonomy, freedom and equality, and is able to share equitably in the distribution of power, knowledge and resources. Achieving this means recognizing the history of injustice, oppression and subjugation faced by women as a social group.

Gender justice actions support the collective autonomy and decision-making power of women in relation to their lives, bodies and work, and actively promote justice in all its dimensions. These actions also support the struggles and demands of all gender identities, including transgender people (see box).

When we reflect on how to make the transition towards a society with equal relations between people, we identify that concrete actions and activities which promote gender justice are fundamental to this process.



UNDERSTANDING GENDER, GENDER IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Gender is often confused with **biology** or **sex** – having male or female reproductive organs – and is therefore assumed to be biologically determined. In fact, gender refers to socially constructed roles, most commonly “feminine” or women’s roles, and “masculine” or men’s roles. These social constructs dictate what it means to be a “proper” or “real” woman or man in society in terms of work, roles, emotions and behaviour. Gender roles are closely linked to the sexual division of labour and promoted and reproduced in society as ‘natural’. But, they can and do change over time and differ between societies.

Gender identity refers to our internal experience and naming of our gender.

A **cisgender** person has a gender identity consistent with the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a biologically male child who identifies as a boy is cisgender.

A **transgender** person has a gender identity that does not match their biological sex. So, a biologically male child who identifies as a girl is transgender.

A child or adult may have a **non-binary** gender identity, meaning they do not identify strictly as a boy/man or a girl/woman. They may identify as both, neither, or as another gender entirely.

Sexual orientation (or sometimes called simply “sexuality”) is used to describe our physical or emotional attraction and feelings for others. There are many different sexual orientations, including heterosexuality (between people of opposite sexes), homosexuality (between people of the same sex), bisexuality (attraction for people of the opposite and the same sex) and queer (a ‘fluid’ sexuality where attraction might change in different situations and times). A common acronym to describe the population that does not fit the heterosexual, cisgender model – considered “normal” in society – is **LGBTQ**. The letters stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. As described above, transgender is *not* a sexual orientation but rather a gender identity, but they are often talked about together.

The LGBTQ population faces discrimination and violence of many forms and in all of our societies.

WHAT IS PATRIARCHY?

Patriarchy is the name given to the system that oppresses and exploits women, their work and their bodies for the benefit of men as a social group. The patriarchal system organises our societies through the **sexual division of labour**, and is maintained by traditions, norms, education and material resources. Women's oppression is based on an economic difference between men and women, with women often lacking money for their own needs or those of their families, and often financially dependent on their husbands or male family members.



“The board meeting was starting, we were all gathering around the table, and I was sitting on my chair waiting to be able to approach the table. But that was impossible because a younger male colleague had occupied both his and my seat and kept me in the back. He ignored all of my subtle warning signs that I was being pushed out of my space. When, in the end, I told him to free my space and that it was a very unpleasant situation, he could not see any mistake in his behaviour and was very rude to me.” Story from France.

Violence, harassment and the threat of violence against women are used as tools of control to maintain patriarchal power relations, especially when women step out of their naturalised roles. Examples include: a woman who is sexually abused “because” she was wearing “provocative” clothing; a woman who suffers domestic violence “because” the dinner was late; a woman who is pressured to have sex with superiors in order to get a promotion; or a woman being pressured into marrying young.

UNDERSTANDING THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOUR

The **sexual division of labour** organises the work of women and men according to a *separation* and *hierarchy* of the public and private spaces within our societies. The public space is associated with the market, paid work and decision-making. It is considered the men's space. The private space is where unpaid, unrecognised, domestic and care work takes place. It is considered the women's space.

The sexual division of labour enables the appropriation of women's bodies and work in favour of capitalist accumulation, through women reproducing and raising generations of workers.

Women in the workforce – the public space – are also subject to the sexual division of labour. Sectors that are considered an extension of care work – such as services, health, education – have a large concentration of women workers, and are typically underpaid, precarious, informal and undervalued. In all sectors, women are also typically paid less than their male colleagues for the same work.

At the international level, the labour force is also divided along these lines. Women in poorer contexts in the global South or some rural areas frequently migrate to do the same kinds of highly exploitative work in wealthier settings in the global North or urban areas.

We can see this division of labour in practice in our own organisations. For example, women not being given as much space and voice as men in meetings or having less decision-making power. Women might have lower paid jobs or might be paid less for the same job as a man or might be expected to do logistical and administrative tasks.

HOW DOES PATRIARCHY WORK WITH OTHER OPPRESSIONS IN SOCIETY?

Patriarchy does not operate alone. It organises society together with other dominant economic, social and cultural systems in order to maintain and reproduce deeply rooted hierarchy and power: the “status quo”. These systems of oppression are **capitalism, class oppression, racism, neocolonialism and heteronormativity**. People also experience different forms of systemic discrimination in their daily lives, due to their special physical and mental needs, age, education level, religion, etc.

The systems of oppression do not compete with each other, rather they **interlink and mutually reinforce** each other. This is also referred to as intersectionality. Through this interlinking, the elites in society hold on to their economic, political and/or social power by oppressing and exploiting the majority: the working class, women, transgender or non-binary people, people of colour, first nation or indigenous peoples, and people of non-dominant ethnicity.

CAPITALISM AND CLASS OPPRESSION

Capitalism is the globally dominant economic and socio-ideological model of our time. It is based on a logic of profit accumulation, infinite economic growth, and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few. In 2018, a report by Oxfam showed that the richest 1% of the global population received a huge 82% of the world’s wealth. That means 42 individuals owned the same amount of wealth as the poorest 50% worldwide. This model of accumulation is only possible through the control and exploitation of territories and work, with hugely destructive consequences for nature, peoples and especially for women.

Although it disguises itself as “progress” and “development”, neoliberal capitalism – the current, free market form of capitalism – is a system that works on the basis of inequality and therefore creates and reproduces oppression. Neoliberal capitalism commodifies and monetises everything, including nature, relationships between people and between people and their territories, and women’s work and bodies.



Class oppression is the exercise of power of the elite over the working class, through the socio-economic, cultural and political hierarchies of our society. The working class are women and men who sell their labour force and skills. The elite or dominant class in a particular society (that may include people of ethnicity or religious groups, etc, that are themselves non-dominant and exploited in other societies) concentrate power by exploiting the working class labour force and controlling capital (wealth that can be invested and inputs to production such as machines and raw material).

In this way, the elite exclude the working class majority from political, economic and social power, and from decision-making, and can structure society to the benefit of their own interests. This exclusion and oppression has real, measurable effects in terms of life expectancy, health, education, housing and contact with the criminal justice system.

RACISM

Racism is the institutionalised system of oppression benefiting the white population. It is an ideology of white supremacy that undermines people of colour – black, indigenous, Asian, non-white – through the exploitation of their labour, bodies and minds.

Throughout history, white supremacy has sought to replace traditional knowledge, values, cultural practices, language and links with nature with the dominant ideology. It has justified violence and xenophobia by claiming the inferiority of people of colour, and maintains its dominance through the use of exploitation, criminalization, killings and incarceration.

People of colour have been violently exploited throughout history, from the colonial slave-trade to contemporary market discrimination that keeps non-white populations in underpaid, undervalued or informal jobs and precarious employment conditions. Women of colour suffer even greater oppression and exploitation of their bodies and work at the intersection of racism-patriarchy-capitalism.

“I am an urban “quilombola” [of African slave descendant] and I live in the poor periphery of the city. I am responsible for the family budget and I work long hours each day to be able to take care of the family. I am a domestic worker, as are many of my black, “quilombola” neighbours, and I earn less than half the minimum salary established by law. Many of my sisters maintain their homes on their own, for various reasons that impact the male black population – our sons, husbands, friends – such as alcoholism related to a lack of perspective because they can’t find good jobs, or killings of black youth...” Story from Brazil.



NEOCOLONIALISM

The claim of racial inferiority has also historically justified the colonisation that continues today in the form of **neocolonialism**.

We understand neocolonialism as the violent appropriation, extractivism, control, exploitation, homogenization and erasure of peoples, cultures, territories and nature. Mega-projects linked to extractivism around the world, for example, are destroying women's relationship to their territories and livelihoods and dramatically increasing the control over women's bodies through sexual violence, trafficking, forced prostitution (for the entertainment of rich and powerful men, but also of exploited workers) and labour. This violent exploitation is carried out by, and to satisfy the economic interests of transnational corporations (TNCs), international capital (for instance, banks) and imperialistic States.



HETERONORMATIVITY

Heteronormativity is the name given to the structure of oppression based on sexual orientation.

The dominant discourse of patriarchy sees heterosexuality (affection, sex, relationships between people of opposite sexes) as the only “natural” sexual orientation in society, and therefore the nuclear family (man, woman, children) is considered the only “normal” family arrangement. Same sex relationships are discriminated against and controlled by the use of physical, verbal and sexual violence because they are seen as a threat to patriarchy and to the heterosexual, nuclear family: the family arrangement from which capitalism benefits economically through women's non-remunerated domestic and reproductive work.

In other words, heteronormativity plays a fundamental role in the structuring and efficient functioning of the sexual division of labour within the heterosexual family and therefore in providing unpaid and underpaid labour for the patriarchal capitalist system.

“I see many Indigenous women facing the same struggle as us: the impact of colonisation and assimilation that has affected our [women's] whole social standing within our people's. The degradation of women during past atrocities has impacted our very fabric of life and there has been a breakdown of our traditional society. The [neocolonial] assimilation must stop, the mining of significant areas must stop. Our belief system is being totally ignored, especially if it is us women speaking. The government or mining companies will only speak to men, which is degrading our cultural rights. They forget respect and the high status women held in our traditional society before colonisation.” Story from Australia.

FIGHTING FOR GENDER JUSTICE AND DISMANTLING PATRIARCHY TOGETHER

It is our understanding of the mutually reinforcing systems of oppression (explained above) that motivates us to build alliances between the environmental justice movement, trade unions and workers, women's organisations and the feminist movement, Indigenous Peoples and peasant farmers, the black movement and LGBTQ organisations. We believe that only together and through working in solidarity can we dismantle patriarchy, transform our societies and promote system change.

“Together with an allied women's organisation, we have initiated a national, grassroots, women-led ecofeminist movement. The goal is to promote women's rights and food sovereignty, and to fight against energy, climate, land and social injustice in rural areas of the country. Several thousand women are already self-organising. They are building their capacity to influence decision-making in local and national development processes and to promote the adoption of feminist development alternatives in communities affected by resource extraction.” Story from Uganda.



6 WAYS

TO PROMOTE GENDER JUSTICE & TO DISMANTLE PATRIARCHY IN OUR WORK & MEMBER GROUPS:

1. Start a gender justice group in your organisation and/or run workshops to help build our collective understanding of patriarchy, power relations and structural oppressions within our federation and society.
2. Actively plan and work towards strengthening the political agency of women, LGBTQ people and people of colour through supporting their decision-making roles and protagonism within your group and networks.
3. Speak up and speak out about patriarchal or oppressive behaviour and power relationships within the federation and in your community.
4. Build alliances and solidarity with anti racist and anti-capitalist grassroots feminist movements. Our struggles are interlinked.
5. Find out more: read the Friends of the Earth International Conceptual Framework on gender justice and dismantling patriarchy, where all these concepts are fully explained.
6. Get inspired! Use the Feminism and System Change Strategic Plan of Friends of the Earth International as a tool to support the incorporation of this gender justice and feminist analysis into your actions and your organisation's campaigning and community work.



PLEASE CONTACT US!

This booklet, and the conceptual framework on which it is based, is written by the Friends of the Earth International Gender Justice Dismantling Patriarchy Working group. We hope it will be a useful and accessible tool for capacity building, training and political formation.

You can read more about our gender justice and dismantling patriarchy work at www.foei.org/what-we-do/gender-justice-dismantling-patriarchy and send us an email to ask for our key strategic and conceptual documents:

gjdp_africa@lists.foei.org (Africa),
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Mauritius
Mozambique
Nigeria
Sierra Leone
South Africa
Tanzania
Togo
Tunisia
Uganda

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Bangladesh
East Timor
Indonesia
Japan
Malaysia
Nepal
Palestine
Papua New Guinea
Philippines
Russia
South Korea
Sri Lanka

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Belgium (*Wallonia & Brussels*)
Bosnia and Herzegovina
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Cyprus
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Finland
France
Georgia
Germany
Hungary

Ireland
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Netherlands
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