

Rooting Feminist Political Ecology into the Womb of the Earth

Let's build a language together, seed by leaf by paw by wing by thread by hand
A language we can all understand
Because isn't that what the times are calling for?
To resist the jaws of power relations?
For radical action and new conversation
For ethical relations, for regeneration,
non-violent communication and cooperation,
For moving past separation and competition,
the policies that bow down to increased production,
and if you think leadership is a position, think again -
it's an orientation
and what we need is transformation.
Yes, transformation.
But what does it mean? What does it look like?
I'll tell you what it looks like.
Listen...can you hear it? Can you?
These are the footsteps of a woman
from a quiet, rural corner of Norfolk stepping
purposefully along a footpath in the gleaming dawn light.
She isn't young, though she also doesn't
think of herself as old.
She just is who she is.
Before long, she is joined on the footpath
by another older woman, then another, and another
until there is a small army of them.
Soon they arrive at the patch of land on the edge of the village
where they will start this morning to create a new wildflower meadow.
The parish council had said no, for this land was earmarked
for new housing – you could fit four, maybe five new houses on here.
But would they take no for an answer?
They would not.
And meeting by letter by email by voice both soft and strong,
they secured this land from which will stretch
towards the wide Norfolk sky
oxe-eye daisy, red campion,
cornflower, poppy.
They work quietly.
There will be no fanfare,
no big news story;
they will not be noted in the great annals of history,
They don't consider themselves as
feminists or activists,
they are not experts in wildflower meadows or regeneration of degraded ground,
they are simply motivated by care:
care for the earth, for one another,
for the more than human lives that sing, swim, fly, creep and crawl
above and beside and beneath them.
They are simply a group of women who are holding up the sky.

And as the sun warms their backs they smile, stretch
and continue with their work.

Night is spreading her ample skirts above Norfolk's meadows, hedgerows and rivers.
Now, come sit with me by the fire.
Let's weave words and spark ideas of
how we cast our net out to draw in
the web of food that will heal us and our hurting planet.
Can we ask one another, honestly, who and what are we in service to?
Do we want to be in service to those corporations that capture water
and place it in chains, a private entity?
Do we want to be in service to corporations that
control what we eat and throw away half of the food
that is produced while bellies
the world over growl and ache with hunger?
As we watch these flames flicker and lick against
the edge of the night let us first acknowledge
that we're all connected, all of us beings from land, sea and sky
and what affects one affects all,
though maybe we haven't fully felt that yet in our bones.
To communicate in a way that heals, not harms,
we must root in feminist principles that sink into the womb of the earth,
that move beyond a patriarchy that stencils scarcity and control across the land.
Look around the fire; can you see?
There are no men here, not a single one.
But this is not about shame
This is *not* about shame,
nor being anti-male.
We need them to sit beside us, we must welcome men
of all ages, colours and creeds to be part
of this story, to paint this brave new dawn alongside us,
so that we too can respond to the patriarchy buried deep within us
like a smooth, hard pebble.
We must make decisions together,
redefine what it means to be a leader,
for isn't a leader someone who creates opportunities for others to share their gifts?
It is what *you* are, what *we* are, what *we can be*.
Leadership is caring for the whole, not a single limb of a body
or one branch of a silver birch.
Leadership is making decisions with care,
with collaboration, with kindness that sings along the tracks of
those who speak quiet truth to power.
Leadership *is* power,
and no – I don't mean that red-hot power we see lauded over us,
strutting and puffing and preening proudly,
for this power is unrooted to the earth. To tending. To reflection. To love.
The power I speak of holds in its heart
the strength to mobilise resources that attend to needs.
To *all* our needs.

But now, let's point our compass north;
 walk beside me until we reach a tiny, rented pocket of land
 nestled beside the winding River Bure
 surrounded by a tapestry of fields,
 often sterile with chemical spray and monoculture.
 But on a single acre, something
 is unfurling, unfolding, rippling over the land,
 through the polytunnels, past the glasshouse and across the orchard
 of pear, plum and apple trees.
 Here, they welcome the arrival of redolent rain and summer solstice as
 the broad beans fatten on their stalks.
 The spring has been dry – too dry – and now the weeds
 tumble and trail.
 But it is not just the leeks and bunched carrots, the courgettes
 and cucumber and planting of winter squash.
 No.
 Here, folk learn about beekeeping and herbalism
 And sometimes you will see children running amok amongst the beanstalks,
 picking fresh herbs to pile on pizzas.
 Here, the earth is turned as steadfastly as justice;
 environmental justice, social justice, for the two
 are as inseparable as fire and heat.
 Here, humans are not only apprentices to a market garden,
 to planting and growing and harvesting and learning skills of
 head and hands –
 they are apprentices to a heart-centred, generative political ecology
 so needed for our times:
 an ecology of kindness, of community and culture
 where small micro acts of change are political,
 because everything is political, right?
 Empowering people to grow food, it's political
Accessing food, it's political.
 Opening the doorway to green spaces that
 so many of us take for granted, it's political.
 This food is community food,
 grown beneath sun, rain, wind
 for those who have and for those who have less –
 love in a solidarity veg bag.
 And amongst friendship and reciprocity and
 a growing confidence that here, on this small
 plot of land enfolded deep in North Norfolk,
 you can recognise what you're good at;
 hold it up in the palm of your hand for all to see.
 You don't need to say a word,
 its power will simply shine on its own and spread
 to others within its orbit.
This is change. *This* is transformation.
 And transformation is political.

It is political ecology.
It is *feminist*, flourishing, nourishing political ecology.

Truth be told,
I don't want to write a poem weighted in bombs and drones,
shredded in suffering and starvation,
but right now I *can't* write a poem without tuning into humanity's open wound,
So bear with me, please, as I digress for a short moment
Because I think it's needed
Because if we normalise this,
We do so at our peril.
What of the feminists in Gaza?
What of the politicians?
What of the ecologists?
What of the academics and dreamers,
the writers, farmers and teachers?
None of us are free until we are all free.
There is a web that connects us and if we turn away,
we turn away from ourselves.
We lose our own heartbeat.

And now.

Imagine a community of trees in that North Norfolk acre:
The pear tree stretches her branches towards academic research
The apple tree bends her boughs to lived experience
The plum tree stands tall, calling those around her to radical action as
life in all its rich multiplicity stands threatened.
Imagine these rooted networks, how these ideas entangle and meld,
an interweaving of stories
that all have at their core the conversations that embrace
living well both within ourselves
and with life in all its richness.
Thousands of miles away in the global south,
there are communities tending the earth who watch
as plantations and mines are built on common land,
oil palms expanding like ink stains as they defend their livelihoods.
The global south is where this field of feminist political ecology was first sewn,
but it is now rooted here, there, everywhere.
We cannot capture, categorise, control, cauterize the natural world;
We cannot keep existing inside this paradigm of power, of endless growth.
Its walls are shattering around us
as we sow seeds of a wider ethics of care.
We are gently laying life forms on a mandala that are decaying and regenerating -
of reciprocity, of solidarity,
of justice that is restorative and transformative,
of de-growth and decolonisation.
And whose voices are we listening to?
Whose are we sidelining?
Who, *really*, is knowledge-keeper, social justice-bringer, experience-giver, feminist-thinker?
Because whatever we give attention to, whatever questions we ask and of *whom*,

shape and settle around us like a second skin,
informing our movements, our methods, our mapping.
Let's bring everyone into the conversation,
let's pass the microphone to those marginalised voices
so they can speak of what justice means to *them*,
not through our own passive lens of privilege.
Let us amplify the stories bursting with that kind of hope
that connects across gender, race, space, class, ability
and that takes each of us by the hand,
leads us quietly to the edge of the world and whispers,
We don't know what will happen
But we must believe that what we do, and *how* we do it matters.
It *matters*.
To hope it to give yourself to the future,
And that pledge to the future gives the present colour, texture, meaning.
We can *all* be feminist political ecologists.
We will work in clay, in art, in soil, in song, in words, in love, in light.
We will shine bright.
Let our rage and hope and care be rooted
And let's build a language together, seed by leaf by paw by wing by thread by hand -
a language we can all understand.

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