

Me Jane, You Tarzan: gender and its relevance to transforming democracy

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During a period of life when exploring 'feminism' enabled me to release my need, until that point unconscious, for male approval to validate my sense of self worth, I came across many hitherto little known teachings and writings by women and men of great wisdom. One saying in particular has come to mind as being particularly relevant to the subject of this essay: '*The bird of the spirit of Humanity cannot fly with only one wing*'. This quote from Vivekananda was referred to by Helena Roerich when she spoke of a '*new Epoch of spiritual cognition that must manifest due respect to the Mother of the World, to the Feminine Element*'. Equally it could be said that 'The Bird of Democracy cannot fly with a broken wing'.

Whilst the title of this article accurately reflects the topic to be discussed, it gives no intimation of the passionate emotions commonly evoked when the topic of 'gender' is raised. I am hoping here to use both passion and intellect to explore lucidly and justly the implications that 'gender' has for the process we are referring to as 'transforming democracy'.

A FEMININE SIGNATURE

Let us look at the matter for a moment through the lens of Gaian Democracy. If, as defined in the Gaian paradigm of democracy, we desire to move towards a '*Government of the people (as active citizens) by thinking, acting and learning together to co-develop just and sustainable societies that will co-exist creatively with Gaian systems on which life forms depend*', we must pay close attention to gender issues. It is heart warming that the name of

a feminine deity - 'Gaia' - has been used to describe a new model of democracy which acknowledges the existence and value of 'soft' systems, as this could be said to imply a welcome to a more feminine approach to politics than our current democratic processes allow. However, for implication to become manifest in experienced reality, men and women need to join together in cooperative enquiry to discover whether the female perception of democracy is akin to the male perception of democracy.

As Marilyn Ferguson (author of the Aquarian Conspiracy) noted some three decades ago: *'Women represent the greatest single force for political renewal in a civilization thoroughly out of balance. Just as individuals are enriched by developing both masculine and feminine sides of the self (independence and nurturance, intellect and intuition), so the society is benefiting from a change in the balance of the power of the sexes. The power of women is the powder keg of our time. As women enlarge their influence in policymaking and government, their yin perspective will push out the boundaries of the old yang paradigm. Women are neurologically more flexible than men, and they have had cultural permission to be more intuitive, sensitive, feeling. Their natural milieu has been complexity, change, nurturance, affiliation and a more fluid sense of time.'*

We can infer from this statement an expectation that women are well suited to function within the 'purposeful complex soft systems' referred to in 'Gaian Democracies' (Schumacher briefing No.9 by Roy Madron & John Jopling), being already 'soft-wired' into them.

However, thirty years on, the mores of planetary, national, local and domestic life are still determined by the residual control of a patriarchal mindset. And it is perhaps unrealistic to expect that the gender imbalance of thousands of years will be righted within a few decades. In today's world, over half the globe's population (women) are prevented from *effectively* participating in national governance (even in those countries that pride themselves upon their

democratic traditions) because of habituated pseudo-democratic procedures that alienate not only women, but 'the Feminine'. We first have to acknowledge the reality of this before a truer form of democracy can manifest; and then we must commit to identifying and implementing radically redesigned decision-making processes and strategies for governance that have upon them the signature of 'the feminine' alongside the signature of 'the masculine';

When somebody asks me what a 'feminine signature' might look like, I describe it thus: a fundamentally cooperative approach that seeks to include, harnessing the human urge to compete as a means of benefiting all rather than the few; as having the patience, consistency and inner resources to bring to term a vision of the future; as using dialogue to reach consensus rather than debate to win or convert; and as sharing information freely rather than hoarding it as a tool for power-broking. Within governance with a feminine signature, all individuals would be developed as 'team players capable of taking on a leadership role when required', allowing any necessary hierarchies to be fluid rather than rigid. Put-downs and point scoring would become a thing of the past; and on the occasions when punishment was considered necessary, it would be designed to fit the 'crime'. Restorative justice and mediation would be the most common way of dealing with conflict and disputes. As well as intellectual and technical ability, professional success would require self-awareness, emotional literacy, people skills and a readiness to regularly 'get hands dirty'. There would be more 'informal'

procedures during which silence, music and dance would be used to facilitate 'listening' – to one's own intuition as well as to others – in order to access creative solutions to 'wicked' problems. Subjective experience would be as highly valued as scientific proof as a means of determining the 'reality' of something. The true value of 'money' as a means of exchange for 'getting things done' would be restored.

I am not necessarily talking about the manner in which 'women' might do things; but about the manner in which the feminine principle would find positive expression through both women and men. Nor am I talking about The Feminine trying to 'take over' from The Masculine, but about recognising that the time has come for the masculine to welcome the feminine when she asserts: 'Hey brother, shift over a little and make room for me. I've walked three steps behind you for a long while, and the time has now come for us to walk this path of human evolution side by side.' But before feminine and masculine can work in partnership externally, out in the world, they have to be reconciled internally – within the subjective inner life of each one of us

The proportion of Life-destroying to Life-enhancing activity in the world would undoubtedly decrease if we remembered that the old adage '*a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do*', is missing its counterpart: '*a woman's gotta do what a man cannot*'. (Thanks, Rhonda Hansome wherever you are, for that little gem).

MASCULINE VALUES

When the current inequality of power between men and women in society is brought up, the case

is often made that whilst men 'govern' out there in the world - in public places, women 'govern' within the home - the domestic place. But if looked at carefully, all that this means in reality is that 'females' are entrusted with the task of ensuring that offspring are permeated with the values of their society, i.e. the 'laws' of right and wrong as defined by 'males'.

At one end of the scale, and perhaps the most overtly brutal example of this - in 2006 remember! - is the grim determination of mothers within certain cultures that their daughters undergo savage mutilation of their genitalia in order that they be considered worthy of marriage – desperately important in those cultures where few women are allowed the means to survive independent of male patronage. Whilst it is certainly the women who 'have the power' to force their daughters to undergo this mutilation, their only reason for doing so is to fulfil a duty imposed upon them by men.

At the other end of the scale, are the daily millions of petty incidents reflecting the dominance of a masculine value system. A recent example of this for me personally was being told to remove words that were 'too emotive' and would give the wrong impression of the company, from an article I had written about a very successful workshop relating to resolving community conflict for the company's newsletter. The offending words were 'courageous' and 'healing'. Yes, I know, it's petty and sad ... but it reflects the daily reality for many ordinary men and women out there in the working world who, for a variety of reasons,

become habituated to suppressing their feelings – their feminine energy.

Whether or not readers would agree that 'emotional literacy' is indeed a quality attributable to the 'feminine', I doubt there would be much disagreement that it is a quality more commonly found in women than in men, nor that it is a quality rarely specified as a job requirement within work arenas presently dominated by men, including of course, commerce, law and politics. And yet an understanding of how emotions inspire, motivate, influence, strengthen resolve, and impact upon the thinking and behaviour of individuals and nations is essential to anyone or any government that wishes to 'win hearts and minds'.

If we are to alleviate this current status quo in which 'the feminine' continues to struggle just to be heard and seen, never mind to be recognised as valuable, we must ask ourselves three questions each time we consider what this 'transformed' democracy might look like and how we go about achieving it. These questions are:

- 'How will the new democracy change the ways in which women and men are represented in politics / government?' (for example, is representation through election a 'male' approach; and what might be a 'female' approach?)
- 'How will this new democracy practically incorporate feminine values and approaches into its structures and processes?'
- 'How will the new democracy change the power relationships between men and women?'

To do any less would, in systems-thinking-speak, indeed be akin to attempting to tackle a 'wicked' problem with a 'tame' solution.

Whether or not this 'transformation' would perforce translate into many more women world-wide being actively involved in the type of political processes typical of today is questionable.

PSEUDO EQUALITY AND A DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

I acknowledge that the following is a generalisation to which there are many exceptions. Nonetheless if we look critically and honestly at scenarios within traditionally male dominated arenas such as commerce, law and politics, where women appear to be gaining equality, and are more frequently stepping into leadership roles, we are most likely to find situations of *pseudo* equality that rarely hold up once light is shone upon them. More often than not close scrutiny will reveal how 'women who make it' in these arenas have to some degree or other subordinated their feminine qualities so as to maximise their masculine qualities in order fight for recognition within a system that is based upon exclusion rather than inclusion and competition rather than cooperation. Whether they make a conscious choice to do this or whether it is an unconscious 'fight' (rather than 'flight') reaction to such an environment is a another question. This is not to imply that it is inappropriate for women to take on these roles, nor that women in general cannot genuinely enjoy a huge buzz and experience a great sense of pleasure in competing and

'winning'. But it is suggesting that the majority of women who have climbed the ladder to Boardroom, Bar or Front Benches have been required to sacrifice their 'feminine essence' in order to be allowed in, accepted, succeed, and be of influence within these areas of society related to governance.

What is clear is that the present highly competitive, oppositional political procedures common to most of the world are not compatible with 'the feminine' approach; and if we are to enable a more effective contribution from women, we first need to understand how gender impacts upon our approach to processes such as research, management, consultation and decision-making.

The imperative for continuously shedding light and love upon this matter is brought home to me with great force when, as an emotionally literate human being functioning within a female body, I am caught unaware and brought up short by the emotional punch still packed by remnants of a powerful 'contempt and hatred' held deep inside my gut towards the male of our species. I am well aware that I am not alone in this experience. Feelings of antagonism towards the opposite gender, often unconscious, are common to men and women, and understandable given the very circumstances a transformed democracy would begin addressing.

Nonetheless the feelings of this nature I experience both shock and sadden me, highlighting as they do my own inability to completely free myself energetically from the desire to 'revenge' past hurts to my

feminine self, and belying the love and delight I usually feel in the presence of men. But to pretend they do not exist would be to lie to myself and thus prevent these same feelings from being healed. And perhaps they are timely feelings. Coming as they do when I am confronted with some new evidence for the continuing oppression of women by men, of the feminine by the masculine, they serve to strengthening my conviction that before true democracy can come about we must first resolve the problems caused by the dysfunctional relationship between the feminine and masculine aspects of our nature.

It is interesting to observe that whilst some of the 'new ideas and initiatives' currently emerging in relation to democratic procedures do embody a more feminine approach; they are, with some notable exceptions, being promoted and developed by men.

Maybe this in itself is a case of gender at play in a positive way, reflecting the active masculine inclination to compete and claim a space in the public arena, following upon the receptive feminine intuiting a concept and nurturing a seed idea into a recognisable 'form' that has an identity strong enough to stand up to public exposure? Or is it a more negative story in which a woman's natural tendency to share and cooperate leads to male colleagues hijacking her ideas and 'claiming them as their own' before she's realised what's going on?

Whichever reason, we need to understand this 'gender impact', and publicly recognise and respect the creative contribution made by the Feminine. It is not

only unjust but short sighted and counterproductive to try to mould female contributions into male shapes before accepting them as valuable. We need instead to be open to identifying where a female way of doings might be more appropriate.

BALANCING THE OPPOSITES WITHIN

Thoughts about whether it is nurture or nature that influences the way women and men think and behave will probably be buzzing in readers' minds; along with the much debated question about whether it is possible or desirable to define certain qualities as either masculine or feminine.

There are many eminent studies that insist that to make reference to inherent or genetic - 'natural' distinctions between the masculine and feminine is counterproductive: either an outmoded way of thinking left over from pre-feminism and contradictory to the goal of gender equality, or more profoundly an unreal perception inherent to our dualistic nature and to be transcended.

I am in agreement with the opinion that blanket statements to the effect that 'women are genetically programmed to 'be like this', and men are genetically programmed to 'be like that', are superficial, ignore the influence of culture and social environment as well as individual gender mix, and tend to reinforce unhealthy stereotypes. However, to take a wider view and see feminine and masculine attributes as the energy polarities that allow the complex manifestations of material Life, is not only rewarding and reassuring, but essential in order to prepare us

for a long-prophesied new paradigm in which gender relationships as we experience them now will indeed be transcended - with consequent impact upon the manner in which society governs itself. Though ancient, the yin yang symbol goes a long way to illustrating this concept of co-dependent and self-choreographing balance between the gender opposites.

Nonetheless, whether in need of transcending or not, to take the view that the impact of 'gender' upon the way we think and do things is irrelevant in life as we experience it now, is along the lines of saying that the impact of a person's skin colour is irrelevant. Choosing not 'to see' how a person's gender impacts upon their daily living allows us to pretend that the wrongs - the very real experience of inequality common to the majority of women in the world today - will be washed away by 'belief' alone, requiring of us no restorative - balancing - action.

Understanding how the opposites inherent to duality are present within the different genders, thus determining the manner in which each individual thinks, behaves and approaches life, is crucial when contemplating a more just and effective form of democracy.

Women and men alike have enthusiastically engaged in highly publicised intellectual debate about this matter over the last few decades. But precisely because of our fear of the power of emotions, as well as because of their more amorphous quality, we have not been so adept at sharing publicly the way we *feel* about these matters. In other words, we have employed a predominantly masculine approach to explore

the matter. Whilst it is important to explore intellectually these questions about 'gender', it is equally important to appreciate and share with each other what it 'feels like' to experience the interplay of these opposites within each one of us and how these feelings influence our perception of life and thus our relationships with others and how 'democratic' or otherwise these are.

For example, the writing of this article has been an intellectual exercise accomplished (with difficulty, I might add!) mainly by using the 'masculine' attributes of focussed and analytical thought; but it is the 'feminine energies' within me that have prompted the activity in the first place by intuiting that they are needed 'out there in the world' if we are to birth a healthy 'new democracy'. And a 'writing' is today's most common way of gaining the attention of

'masculine energies' - more at home with devising and attending to the mechanics and structures of democracy than with listening out for its flavours, its colours, its textures: the spirit of the energetic impulse underlying the democratic ideal.

When exploring how gender-specific traits might impact upon democratic procedures, it is not necessarily effectual to commence with debate about whether certain contrasting attributes can be defined as masculine or feminine - though we reach that point quickly! It is more pertinent to start our exploration by investigating whether certain 'opposites' are, on the whole, apportioned equal 'weight' - are equally valued and utilized - in the running of our nations. For example, let's appraise this short list of 'more or less' opposites below:

emotional	rational
intuitive	analytical
passive	active
soft	hard
co-operative	competitive
weak	strong
roundabout	direct
tender	tough
unassuming	commanding
follower	leader
hesitant	assured
compliant	single-minded
acquiescent	authoritative
flexible	rigid
adaptable	resolute
share	withhold
receptive	broadcasting
love	fear

Is it not the case that the right-hand list, more than the left-hand list, contains words that are most likely to be used to express admiration within political, judicial and commercial circles? And if we are honest in our appraisal is it not also true to say that the words on the right hand list are those generally associated with masculinity, and those on the left most often associated with femininity?

In reality is it not the case that pairs of opposite qualities or attributes are of inherently equal value? Were it not for the primary great energy polarities of Positive and Negative - Father and Mother - how would we have the physical experience of human material existence upon this planet? Each individual quality can be applied with beneficial or harmful affect. For example, the nurturing quality of the feminine can as easily be used to 'restrict' and 'diminish' as to 'encourage' and 'support'; and the masculine analytical quality can as easily be used to see human beings as machines as to create the actual machines themselves.

However, when one of the pair is continually subordinated to the other, the imbalance created is not only inharmonious and therefore distressing, but potentially destructive. Only when opposites are used wisely in cooperative partnership will 'the bird of the human spirit' be able to soar. And only then will the aim of democracy be fulfilled.

PSEUDO STATES

As long as we continue to be governed by patriarchy - internally as well as externally - our governance will remain out of balance. We will not successfully change that which is external - the mores of societies - the customs and conventions that embody

fundamental values - until enough of us have changed internally. If the internal relationship between masculine and feminine is out of balance within a majority of individuals, then so too will be the external relationships that typify the culture of those individuals.

Women will only stop trying to emulate men, and instead successfully introduce a feminine approach into what has previously been 'male only' territory, once they have reached a comfortable relationship with the masculine element within themselves - their *animus* as Jung named it. In the same way, men will only be receptive to the input of women in what they currently perceive as their territory once they feel comfortable with their *anima* - the feminine element within themselves. These well balanced internal relationships are required to move us on from the stage many of us are in at the moment: where the choice for the majority of women is either to become pseudo-men or to portray themselves as exaggeratedly 'feminine' - also a pseudo state; and the choice for men is either to become pseudo-women ('new men') - or to portray themselves as excessively 'masculine' (macho men) - another pseudo condition. This is why we have a pseudo-democracy!

There is a way of approaching this problem which takes us beyond the human experience of being a man or woman struggling to break through the mores of a global culture that holds so many in thrall to the expectations associated with physical gender. To bring about balance anew, men and women need only be willing to relinquish participation in the 'blame game' - the stand-off between male and female. If we but pay attention to and nurture that part within each of us that desires union with its

opposite, not only in the physical act of procreation, but also in creative imagination and soul expression, we shall rapidly become human beings able to fly within the new expanded paradigm of human potential, in which we shall indeed see democracy transformed. And it is recourse to feminine receptivity to the creative inner world that will enable us to do this.

Imagine for a moment what the world could be if rational thought was always guided by a loving heart, powerful emotions utilised

by a wise mind: feminine and masculine working in reverent partnership with each other. What a heart-stoppingly wondrous experience Life would be.

This writing is more than a plea for 'equality of the sexes', though this is a worthy aim of itself. It is a plea for human beings to invite and welcome The Mother to dine at the same table as The Father. It is a plea for more and more human beings *to wake up and come to our senses before further heedless destruction vandalises the beautiful face of this planet.*

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How you can help

One of the reasons for AHP(B)'s existence is to raise awareness of a humanistic approach to living and working. In recognition of this, AHP(B) will be having a stand, jointly with AHPP, at BACP's Therapy Today exhibition in October. It is being held in Islington, North London on 6 & 7th October, alongside the BACP conference.

We are looking for volunteers to help us organise, set up and man the stand, create exhibition displays, plus any other practical support that might occur to you. Please make a note in your diary now about the exhibition, and do contact Tony Morris on chair@ahpb.org.uk with offers of help.

In addition to this, we are seeking a workshop organiser. We have offers from some members to lead workshops around the country on behalf of AHP(b), and we need one person who can liaise with those who have volunteered their services, and set the workshops up – ie organise venues, publicity (with some help from S&S), bookings and so on.

If this is something you'd like to get involved with, please contact Jacky Walker on jackywalker@tiscali.co.uk