

## THE MILLION WOMEN'S MARCH IN THE USA AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR FEMINISM

*Mariam Irene Tazi-Preve, February 9, 2017*

On the 21st of January, one day after the inauguration of the US president, I was at the Million Women's March in Washington DC. With approximately 500,000 participants (three times more than on the day of the inauguration) – nearly all women—at an estimated 3 to 4 million more in the whole country it was the largest demonstration ever held in the USA. From the perspective of an Austrian, who has been living in the USA for five years, I would like to describe the event and then analyze what it means for feminism generally.

### Description

It was already clear in the morning that a unique event was taking shape. The Metro was full of women with colorful caps and homemade signs. Everyone was excited and full of anticipation. Near the center all the standing caused me to get off the Metro before the arranged meeting point. Everyone was amazed at the crowds on the streets, I worked my way forward, but got caught in the masses and did not make it to the stage. As I searched in vain for a relatively quiet place where I could observe those carrying signs and take pictures, I let myself be propelled along Pennsylvania Avenue.

The signs are funny while at the same time full of fury: “We will overcomb”, “Keep your tiny hands off my rights”, “Can’t build walls, hands too small”, “There will be hell toupee”, “Things are so bad, even introverts have to protest”, “Pussy grabs back”, “There Is So Much Wrong It Cannot Fit on This Sign”. No one wrote out T's name, to avoid promoting the brand.



Women's eruption and uprising is related to the president personally. The idea for the demonstration came about after a notorious video appeared in October 2016 of him bragging to a journalist in 2005 about his unabashed sexual attacks on women and how they let him get away with it because he is famous. As he

dismissed it as “locker room talk”, 11 women went on television to testify that it wasn't just talk, but that they were actually attacked by him<sup>1</sup>. Many of the signs the women were carrying expressed outrage at the candidate's brutal sexism that people tolerated and the monstrosity at having such a man as president.

So many young women stood together with their pink/purple pussy hats, excited because many of them had never been to a demonstration before. The atmosphere was exhilarated, yet at times nearly toppling because it was impossible to get through and it was clear that the organizers were overwhelmed by the sheer masses. Slowly we all realized that the demonstration was much larger than expected and was literally bursting at the seams. The enormous grounds of the National Mall weren't open for the women, only the side streets.

I am amazed by the American women's playful approach. They like to wear costumes on all occasions and creatively put together clothing, banners, hats, bonnets and small wagons with children and signs in all sizes. The European tradition of marches on March 8<sup>th</sup> doesn't exist in the USA and the last women's demonstration was 13 years ago, when in 2004 during the George W. Bush administration, a half million women took to the streets for “women's and reproductive rights”. There were some men among the women, often they were with a group of women or a family, some carried their own signs explicitly opposing patriarchal conditions. It was obvious that T was in a city that hates him, in Washington DC and in all big cities he is met with pure rage.



The statements being carried were primarily so-called “women's issues”: abortion, equal pay, sexual harassment and “civil rights”: the “black life matters” movement (police brutality, mass incarceration, voter suppression), immigration, “gay rights,” followed by environmental protection and opposition to the expected elimination of “Obamacare”, health insurance for everyone. I only saw one sign against war “We will not give birth to sons and daughters for war” and one about the economic putsch (“corporate coup d'état”).

And that is what I heard when I talked to individual women, all of whom appeared to be shocked and disgusted:

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, there was a women on an airplane assigned to a seat next to T. in the 1970's when he still flew commercially, and suddenly, he was “all over me”, she said, she could hardly hold him off and no one helped her. After several minutes she was able to change seats. Later they met at a conference, he addressed her, “I know you, you're the whore from the airplane.”

- "If the majority in Congress were women, we would have completely different politics", one said. Many demonstrated their intact faith in the representative democracy and the American Constitution.



-One woman, wearing a pink crown of the statue of liberty, was pessimistic about T being a dictator, who may refuse to vacate the office after 4 years. And that emigration to Canada was actually an option for her, she was busy learning about emigration regulations.

-I heard women who were very upset that there wasn't a woman in the top position of the country, as many had hoped, and feminists of the second wave of the women's movement feared that they wouldn't live to see it happen.

-I heard that men get away with lots of things that would be unthinkable for women. And that women are always judged more harshly than men.

-I heard about the methods used to destroy activism since Vietnam. The peace movement, occupy Wall Street and others were defeated either by pure police brutality and criminalization or through infiltration of the secret service.

-And I heard that for many women this was the first experience with political resistance. In contrast to Europeans, Americans haven't had any faith in their own ability to instigate changes in the system.

-And I remember seeing two women dressed in black carrying a sign with which they cursed T and conjured up witchcraft.

## Why I was filled with anger and sadness when I got home

Why did I feel drained and furious after the march instead of energized? If it's true that it is “sentipensar” that leads to true insight, when feeling and thinking combine to lead to insight, I have to trust my intuition, I thought. That's even more difficult for me because as an intellectual, I am accustomed to cutting off emotion and staying in my head, analyzing instead of feeling discomfort, pain and grief.

That was how my personal surroundings in these days were. I was living in a house in which the primary needs, cleanliness and care, were not met. Even on the morning when we left for the demo, my host assumed that I knew where the coffee was and how a coffeemaker works. He only made one cup for himself. That is what it looks like when maternal qualities are missing and you have to leave the house uncared for.



This is compounded by the general negligence in the USA pertaining to the culture of food, where at home, as in restaurants, food is almost always served with plastic and cardboard (cups, forks, knives and plates) and sandwiches are carried in paper bags.

And it is a grievous mistake to spend such an important day for women not in women's company, but in the company of men – in my case in the company of my husband and my host.

And the march itself:

It made me sad to see all the little girls with signs "I am female. I am the future," or a six-year-old with a sign "Little Donald, you've been a bad boy. Now go to your room for the next four years." But actually it's only a trick. People want no more for these little girls than has always been intended for boys. They are supposed to be satisfied with “equal rights, equal pay,” the carrot that has been offered to women since the 1970's.

People want to sell these girls on the same battle that my generation and the generation before me already fought. What a waste of the energy, I was thinking, that we women are going to need for new and different revolutionary work.

When women denounce the sexism of a president, they overlook the fact that it has long since become a huge branch of pornography and prostitution, instead of – as they thought before T's attacks – supposedly no longer in existence. Until now political rhetoric considered crude sexism to be primitive, old-fashioned, and something to be overcome, primarily associated with third world countries. Although with T it has only reared its filthy head from the swamp, sexism isn't new, it has only emerged in an unbelievably crude form.

And then some say that things have generally gotten better for women. And I understand how difficult it is to keep these marching women in line. That is related to the modernization of the patriarchy. Motto: change the language and the outward appearance, then women will believe that something has actually changed.

There were survivors of witches persecution, survivors of slavery, survivors of the murderous persecution of the indigenous on the street. This is a reflection of the museums around the “Mall”, lining the center of Washington, including the National Museum of the American Indian and the recently opened Museum of African American History and Culture. But they are surrounded by the regalia of power, the oligarchy, the history of America, built on colonialism and the establishment of the order of the owners. The museums, memorials and galleries of presidents, principles of patriarchy chiseled in stone are saying: you should not forget that this order is based on violence and on wars, on forced seizures of land and also that this order is supposedly permanent.

I lack the naive faith of American women that a female president could have saved them, their faith in the Constitution, in Congress and the Senate and their conviction that the Democratic party only needs to get younger, that the more radical base only needs to get in power. Or belief that feminism means simply being a good person, as one journalist claimed.



Could my anger be caused by the lack of daily living female community. The fact that their energies are tied up taking care of men every day, so that they are maintaining this system that we absolutely do not want.

All the suggestions expressed from the podium were aimed at assimilation into the system – getting into politics everywhere, campaigning and running for office, in order to—like the Tea Party, which developed as a reaction to Obama's election 8 years ago – replace the establishment and moderates in the Democratic party with radical factions.

Could it be that the fury is so boundless that it tips over into mourning because you once again have the feeling that women are directing their criticism against lots of individual issues and it looks like it's going to dissipate. So that the “new movement” as it's already being called, will help many, but yet again, not women.

### **The new US President and economic and military war**

The Democrats, who out maneuvered Bernie Sanders and nominated Hillary Clinton, are freaking out now. Supposedly dedicated to liberal values, they hoped to continue on a course that they won't call by it's name. Namely the course of sustained global war – the USA has over 1,000 military bases and is present in about 140 countries in open or clandestine military conflicts<sup>2</sup> - to maintain and expand economic dominance. Since the cold war this global plan is also referred to as the “New World Order.” They count on the votes of women, blacks, the youth and are now facing an enormous movement who can no longer bear their compromises and especially their silence regarding Wall Street<sup>3</sup>. Many of them had been enthusiastic about Bernie Sanders' social democratic demands (tuition free college, healthcare for all, etc.).

There has already been a lot written and said about the person of the president. The confusion he created during the campaign has begun to clear up after two weeks in office. He is a millionaire who acquired his money through shady maneuvers and illegal practices – he hardly owns any buildings, mostly he leases the name T and is paid to have his name on hotels. He has declared bankruptcy countless times and bilked innumerable businesses. When he's caught constantly and blatantly lying, his accounts are referred to as “alternative facts”.<sup>4</sup>

He is for fracking and the unbridled exploitation of nature to get to the oil and gas, whether foreign or domestic. He campaigned against Wall Street, and then brought the CEOs of Exxon and Goldman Sachs into his cabinet. T promised to rebuild infrastructure, naturally, he didn't mention that it would be great business deals for corporations and “private equity”. His acts of office in the first two weeks are sowing fear. “Shock” and “awe” is the motto (Klein 2007). It is nothing less than a putsch and T has proven himself to be a corporate “con man”.

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2 Compare [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) and David Swanson (2016).

3 Because American women are practical, they are following a simple plan day by day to prevent what they can. Every day the Senators (2 per state) and the local Congress representatives are being bombarded with requests, every step that the Democrats take is being viewed with suspicion. All of T's appointments which require confirmation by the Senate are being sabotaged, all procedures, all the resolutions are being blocked in every conceivable way. Since the “Muslim ban” the government has been confronted by thousands of lawsuits.

4 Sometimes in his bluntness he says something true, such as in the context of Putin's politics, when he said that the USA isn't so “innocent”.

His cabinet appointments are placing corporations and Wall Street directly in the White House, it is a coup, making politicians serving as middlemen definitively obsolete. This has given neoliberal globalization a new form which cuts out politics. Political procedures in Congress have been reduced to meaningless theater.

He wants to prevent jobs from leaving, keeping them in the country, in order to serve his constituents crying for their lost manufacturing jobs. He is a nationalist who wants to “create jobs,” under the motto “America first.” He bullies corporations to keep jobs in the USA instead of moving them to Mexico, etc., like the largest American air conditioner manufacturer. That is why he is against TTIP<sup>5</sup> and wants to “renegotiate” NAFTA<sup>6</sup>. He is against international trade deals for the same reason that European rightists oppose the EU. He has nothing against neoliberalism and promises corporations that he'll eliminate “70% of all regulations” which have been limiting their excessive profits<sup>7</sup>.

His first signatures among all of the numerous infamous “executive orders” were not only against TTIP, but to block abortion as effectively as possible (Global Gag Rule), and the approval of the South Dakota Keystone Pipeline<sup>8</sup>. He demonstrates that he is a man of the right-wing extremists, as marionette of the Christian fundamentalists and the ideology of white power (“white supremacy”).

He supports Russia, because he and Putin have common interests on global exploitation of oil and gas and both are united in the war on “terror”. My prognosis is that a war over natural resources in the Middle East will intensify. T states openly that he wants to gain access to the oil in Iraq and in other regions on a larger scale than the previous government. Both the left and the right are confused by his love for Russia because it contradicts the traditional American anti-Russian ideology.

The cabinets of Obama and Canada's Pierre Trudeau look very different in that T's cabinet is almost exclusively white men. With T there is no need for liberal rhetoric because he simply and directly pursues the neoliberal agenda of military and economic war by any means.

And on the subject of media: we all depend on them, yet the truth does not emerge until afterward. Where did I get my information. I watch the TV stations MSNBC, CNN and the news show Democracy NOW on FreeSpeech TV, the only channel not sponsored by corporations. I read the best newspapers in the country, the NYT<sup>9</sup> and the Washington Post, I listen to public radio NPR and read the website [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca). Except for the latter Canadian website only on Democracy Now - where Noam Chomsky and Naomi Klein

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5 TTIP: The Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the USA was negotiated over the course of years.

6 NAFTA: 1994 initiated free trade agreement between the USA and Canada and Mexico.

7 Many of which were introduced by Barack Obama.

8 The construction of the Keystone Pipeline was blocked in December 2016 after many months of protest.

9 E.g. the NYT is to read with reservation. On a regular basis they publish contributions on “Putins’ state of mind” and how the danger emanates from Russia to keep up the anti-Russian ideology.

appear – is there significant criticism of war and neoliberalism. A non-patriarchal point-of-view is nowhere to be found.<sup>10</sup>

### **My Analysis or what this means for Feminism**

Why, I ask, don't these millions of women in the USA and elsewhere just wipe away the patriarchy? "Hear her roar" was printed on one poster with a lioness' head. There is no way to avoid recognizing that the resistance is female, not male. That it has no leader, that it passionately promotes unity, and opposes disunity and dissension. It opposes the rhetoric of isolation and hate in favor of love.

This makes me furious about the lost opportunity to exercise criticism on the system. This was an enormous insurgence of wounded women, who were American enthusiastical. The problem was that the demonstration was neither political nor based in theory.

Four hours long women (and three men) spoke at the podium, prominent and less prominent, representatives of all the "communities" and Democratic politicians. The speeches and banners showed that the goal of the demonstration was unclear and that it was more of a sequence of issues. There was talk of women's rights and reproductive choices, followed by the connection to the civil rights movement with respect for ethnic groups (African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian American), defending the rights of immigrants and religious liberty (especially Muslims) and sexual liberty (Gay Rights), and right at the end came criticism on militarism and the US state of permanent war and neoliberal economy.

The mothers at the podium were introduced as the mothers of young black men who were murdered by armed white men. And as (deceased) mothers of civil rights heroes, who have been honored since the 60s in ways that the suffragettes and the women of the second women's movement were never honored. The mothers of murdered children have gotten together, support each other and have become the strongest activists against the gun industry.

Only two voices from the – old – generation of feminists were heard at the demonstration and not a single feminist was shown on television. Angela Davis was the only one who spoke about the patriarchy. Gloria Steinem, an icon of the feminist movement of the 70s, opened the dance of speakers and instead of commemorating the countless earlier female warriors, invoked Martin Luther King. No wonder that one of the signs read: "I Can't Believe I'm Still Protesting This Shit". And – as one American feminist of that time remarked soberly – the second women's movement betrayed women because "liberation had become the assumption of

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<sup>10</sup>Until now there has been a consensus within the leftist press to uphold liberal values, but at the same time to pursue a strict anti-Russian course, and not to question the neoliberal economic course, including Wall Street. Now the media have become victims of T, who shuts them out with his tweets and communicates directly to his audience. He also attacks all the media except Fox News as "Lügenpresse" and "the opposition," individual journalists (especially women) are called out by name and mocked.

dominant cultural male values.” (Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum 2013). The realization that since the 1970's women haven't been offered anything but assimilation into the system.

So I ask myself, what is preventing women from demanding radical change?

### *The Diversity Concept and the Elimination of Women*

First that is the problem – especially in the USA – of political and academic implementation of the diversity concept, which has in principle replaced the demands of feminism. The concept is the elimination of disadvantages of any people based on gender, race, religion, etc.. Actually this has become the practice of calling attention to the minorities most marginalized in the past and present. The women's march followed this concept, “make all voices heard”.

It is becoming clear that introducing the diversity discourse into practice produces strange effects. The white women who began organizing the march were soon pressured to integrate black and Muslim and women of Latin-American backgrounds, which resulted in the appearance of three Muslim women who were all completely veiled and who called for the respect and dignity of the marginalized. Their appearance made it clear that they in no way represented the “image of liberated women”.<sup>11</sup>

The other problem concerns the elimination of women, for instance the attempts of transgender men to present themselves as female participants in order to undermine the definition of what a woman is. Some women insist that a woman is exclusively someone who has a uterus. But that distracts from the actual problem. Unnoticed by many and under the guise of tolerance, women are at work eliminating themselves; they are no longer supposed to identify themselves as women. This is the same way the identification of mother is supposed to disappear. New language is being introduced “pregnant people” (for instance by the British Medical Association). This introduces the technological replacement of mothers (by machines and surrogate mothers, etc.) as normal and is also given a coating of moral legitimacy. Many experiments with reproductive technologies signal that being a woman is arbitrary and can be replaced at any time by technology, medicine, men, or by male creations.

All of these tendencies that were manifested at the demonstration, rob the “Women's march” of its political power.

“Who are these women marching for?” asks the New York Times after three days have passed. And I recognize that if the women were a unified political power, they could have become a revolution. Instead what they offered was the “right presence,” tedious representations of all the individual groups, all of which demanded respect and dignity – and didn't take it any further. Ironically, all the discussion about identities doesn't unite, but divides. Concerns about identity pushed the questions of war, neoliberal economics and politics in general

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<sup>11</sup> There would be a lot to add to the discussion on the veil. For now I want to stress the point that there are even a variety of ways how to wear the veil. The three women wore it in a way signaling a very conservative interpretation of Islamic rules.

to the sidelines. The diversity discussion did the work of preventing feminism from taking even one step forward.

### *Leftist Men*

Leftist men outdid themselves in undermining the revolutionary potential of the women's march. They are everywhere, on television and in the print media. They belittled the significance of organized women's ability to mobilize so many other women. And that this is not the cry of a minority, but the majority of the population.

There were three men at the podium and one of them had the clear intention of promoting his own activism. He quickly called for the initiation of concrete actions without mentioning that he was speaking exclusively to women. At least his long speech was rudely interrupted by Ashley Judd (worth watching on Youtube!) with a statement "I am a feminist" and a monolog on "I am a nasty woman".

The matriarchal aspect of the organization of the podium talks, namely not to introduce hierarchies among the women and to have a long list of speakers, who were all given the same amount of time to talk with no regard to their prominence, proved to be fatal in the patriarchy. Men want to see leaders and when no leaders are available, men assert themselves immediately, there left and right plays no role.

That is why they were immediately on all the channels and in all the papers. They appropriated the topics and degraded the "women's issues" to some kind of "sexism problem of a minority." Leftist men don't actually familiarize themselves with women's research and feminism. They are primarily interested in taking ownership of the subject without having any objections to the fundamental principles of the patriarchy. In one long article on the Women's March "Time - The Resistance Rises. How a March becomes a Movement" (6th of February 2017) the "women's" part of the march was crossed out and the only person interviewed about the demonstration was a leftist man.

### *Matriarchal Elements*

Although the demonstration was itself an enormous statement of women and demonstrated pure antagonism between the patriarchal world, which T represents, and a non-patriarchal world view, which affirms life as well as the joy of life and the dignity and respect of all life, both human and nature. The election by feet was made a reality here, all the women in the country were called to strike on this day.

The resistance proved to be female; women stood up to defend themselves from attacks, they also stood up for others, for instance T's dictatorial order against "dangerous immigrants" issued on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January. That is made obvious by the large portion of women among the people in the USA making a fuss about the "Muslim

ban". And they are also standing up as the Attorney General (whose resistance caused her to be fired), as activists, as journalists.

We can call the playful and joyous way that women take to the streets matriarchal, in the sense of non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical and without intrigue. Also the way that leaders are not the focus of attention conforms to matriarchal principles. The matriarchal societies still living today provide us with models of different ways to understand the world (Göttner-Abendroth 2012). Their social, political and economic life moves according to "maternal principles" in accord with the original meaning of matriarchal "mater-arche" - "in the beginning the mother." These societies "know" nothing about the foundation of our civilization, namely the exploitation of people and nature, war and competition and hierarchies.

### *Criticism of Patriarchy*

Here is one explanation for the serious confusion of the concept of patriarchy:

According to the Latin-Greek original meaning of "pater-arche," the rule of fathers has the following characteristics: strong hierarchies (such as in politics and corporations); the principle of divide and rule (don't let people unite); the exploitation of people and nature is seen as legitimate (for instance the working conditions in sweatshops, worldwide demand for fossil fuels); the rejection of every type of responsibility for people or for nature; liberty for a few, not for all; progress is defined as the further development of people, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary (more wars, more social disparity); the acceptance of violence; war as an acceptable means of asserting one's interests; the inversion of all ethical values – war is seen as good, peace activists are dangerous; and finally the birth of children by mothers has no value, while technological inventions (such as surrogate mothers) are seen as creative.

Instead the motto has already become: you only need to abide by the rules of "diversity," then we can keep the patriarchal structures. And as soon as the civil rights and women's rights are respected, we can continue with the agenda (in the USA) to a Democratic president. And the progress toward elimination of women/mothers is seen as a characteristic of progress that must be accepted. This reprisal demonstrates the lack of theory in the entire endeavor.

The actual problem was never stated. Instead of a personal reckoning with the president, there should have been massive criticism of the system. Racism, sexism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, devastation of the environment stem from the same thinking and the same "system". We cannot avoid thinking in terms of politics and system in order to get a hold of what was actually driving women into the streets.

Threatening women's bodies with violence is part of the violent conditions that characterize the patriarchy. Without criticizing patriarchy (Werlhof 2015) we can't understand how the political, economic and personal violations of physical integrity are related.

## Forecast

For me it was necessary to experience the women's march as part of the crisis that was nearly physical. This brought me to comprehend what is going on with the women's movement, where the weak points are, and in which direction things need to progress. As justified as it is for women to rebel against the violation of their dignity, it is just as necessary to see the patriarchy as a system of systematic use of violence and the transformation of the world into something artificial, which only seems to promise liberation. This must be countered as a political force in a radical manner instead of looking for a place within this system. This strategy must fail

*"Because they took place at the men's table instead of shuttering it." (Sherri Mitchell 2016).*

It was also obvious that this was the beginning of a new movement. Women can no longer be silence.

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Poem by Annie Finch (In: Dispatches Editions – Resist Much / Obey Little, Inaugural Poems to the Resistance, 2017)

**THE WOMEN ARE MOVING AT LAST**

I awaken  
In perfection.  
All around me  
Women are marching.  
In our pink hats,  
We are marching.  
We are marching  
In our despair.  
With breasts bare,  
We are marching.  
In our own places  
We march.  
At last the women are moving.  
For our lives and our planet, we move.  
Out of our feelings and blessings,  
Out of our urges and thoughts,  
Out of our sensations, our knowledge, our anger,  
And finally  
In  
Our righteousness  
We march.  
At last the women are moving!  
At last the women are moving.  
The women are moving at last.  
We march outward.  
Inward we march.  
Towards each other we march.  
Towards them, with them, and for them, also,  
We march.  
From the beauty of our mothers we march,  
With our yonis we march.  
With our freedom we march.  
In our wisdom we march,  
In our pain.  
In our knowledge we march.  
For our daughters we march.  
For our lovers, our brothers and sons, we march.  
In the power of the Goddess, we march.  
We march on.  
Out of everything ready, we march.  
For ourselves in the future, we march.  
In our sleep and  
Our waking,  
We march  
(At last the women are moving),  
March on.