

NATURE STRIKES BACK: NATURALIZING GENDER IN SOME FEMINIST DISCOURSES

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Why do they want to shoot pigeons? I asked Momma and Momma said, They're men. It's what men do when they can't shoot one another.

Joyce Carol Oates, *Man Crazy*

(Resumen)

La conocida “Lucha de sexos” ha atravesado distintas etapas a través de los tiempos. La idoneidad de unos y otros para el ámbito público y privado respectivamente ha sido uno de los temas tradicionales. En algunos casos una serie de países han sido considerados “masculinos” o “femeninos” según el grado de participación de la mujer en la política y asuntos públicos. El presente ensayo retoma otro de los puntos de debate, el de la biología como categoría política y la naturalización del discurso femenino.

Let me start with a quotation from a book published in 1999:

Now women are about to change the world. Why? Because during the millions of years that our forebears travelled in small hunting-and-gathering bands, the sexes did different jobs. Those jobs required different skills. As time and nature tirelessly propagated successful workers, natural selection built different aptitudes into the male and female brain. No two people are the same. But, on average, women and men possess a number of different innate skills. And current trends suggest that many sectors of the twenty-first-century economic community are going to need the natural talents of women.

Though the writer refers to male and female brains and occasionally refers to socio-biology, she is not conservative nor an antifeminist male supremacist. On the contrary her book entitled *The First Sex, The Natural Talents of Women and how they are changing the World* is typical of a trend within feminism: that of linking nature or biology with the social and political position of women and men. Such a link between biology, male and female natures and social organisation was, of course, quite common in the 19th century and served as a form of legitimisation for the oppression of women. To men belonged the public sphere of business and politics; to middle and upper class ladies the home and the store were natural spaces for their biologically determined destinies. Today the new defenders of

biology and nature do not claim that women are better equipped to be stay-at-home housewives but they do claim, in a way, that biology is destiny.¹

Nineteenth century science that claimed to establish man's superiority over woman has now been discredited although some writers like Camille Paglia may at times sound as if they were still in thrall to the most extreme forms of male glorification.² Less virulent supporters of innate and unavoidable differences between the two sexes may claim that now women's turn has come and they will dominate the new era.

Late twentieth century science or indeed early 21st century research may show or prove or suggest that, on average there are key differences between men and women. History though should help us be wary. Indeed, even in the above quotation extolling the virtues of women, the biological is counterbalanced by references to history. Several times in the book the writer refers to biological differences between men and women but then adds "in the United States".³ Some of the characteristics she attributes to men or women are

1. In a paper in *Foreign Affairs* Sept-Oct 1998, hardly a feminist publication, Francis Fukuyama of "end of history" fame, argues that "biology is not destiny" though he compares chimp societies to human ones and agrees with evolutionary biologists who claim there are profound differences between the sexes that are genetically rather than culturally rooted" and therefore approves of what he calls "the return of biology". What is one to make though of such pronouncements as: "The northern Gombe chimps had done in effect, what Rome did to Carthage in 146 B.C: extinguished its rival without a trace" and: "A professor receiving tenure at a leading university, a politician winning an election, or a CEO increasing market share may satisfy the same underlying drive for status as being the alpha male in a chimp community." Humans then are like chimps, and Fukuyama a real chump, maybe.

2. Thus she writes in "Rape and Modern Sex War," *Sex, Art and American Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) 50-51.: "We must remedy social injustice. But there are some things we cannot change. There are sexual differences that are based on biology. Academic feminism is lost in a fog of social constructionism. It believes we are totally the product of our environment." and "Aggression and eroticism are deeply intertwined. Hunt, pursuit and capture are biologically programmed into male sexuality. Generation after generation, men must be educated, refined, and ethically persuaded away from their tendency toward anarchy and brutishness. Society is not the enemy, as feminism ignorantly claims. Society is woman's protection against rape". This is clearly a self-defeating argument for society, in Paglia's mind, can counteract biology although "some things cannot change." So biology does not totally determine humans. It is also ironical to note that Paglia, in fact, agrees with some of the feminists she criticises. Some academics feminists are not social constructionists at all but believe in biological determinism. The only difference is that Paglia construe men's brutishness as positive and creative. "The traditional association of assertion and action with masculinity, and receptivity and passivity with femininity seems to me scientifically justified," writes this author who claims to be both a Sadean and a Freudian.

3. For instance: "At talking women have the edge. Infant girls in the United States often babble more than infant boys." 58.

attributed to specific nations by cross-cultural experts.⁴ These experts claim, for instance, that Germany and the U.S. are "masculine" cultures while France is "feminine" —though women are more active in politics and business in the so-called masculine countries and quite marginalized in the so-called feminine country. So even if nature is striking back it obviously cannot totally reject history nor eliminate sociology. The "return of biology" is by no means confined to some trends within feminism and is often far more worrying in political science, politics or philosophy. Yet our topic is restricted to the forms it takes within feminism.

In this paper we will try to document the return of biology as a political category and the naturalisation of feminist discourse, then we will attempt to analyse and interpret the post-modern return to the old belief that biology is destiny. As a transition though I offer another quotation in order to stress the wide and reassuring diversity both within and without feminism. It is from Wendy Kaminer, the president of the *National Coalition Against Censorship*, in a somewhat Jane Austenian piece entitled "Sex and Sensibility":⁵

Having attended a women's college and spent half of my professional life affiliated with a female institution, I know better than to believe that women are naturally more sharing, caring, and cooperative than men, although in general, they may be more polite. I'm not denying the existence of distinct masculine and feminine cultural styles or different male and female perspectives based largely on experience. I'm simply asserting what was once recognized as a basic tenet of liberal feminism: sex is no predictor of character or moral sensibility.

"Cultural/differential" feminism is a movement that arose in the 1970s and that stems from the view that the values, interests and priorities of women and men are different from and often superior to those of men. The establishment of a kind of women's counter culture accompanied it with a focus on feminist/feminine art, writing, history.... Differential feminists suggest that "mainstream feminism" is too "phallogocentric", too accepting and uncritical of typically "masculine" values, too rejecting and critical of typically "feminine" pursuits, behaviour and style. They define specific and separate feminine and masculine "natures". Their analysis contrasts masculine with feminine behaviours and establishes a Manichaeian vision of "female good" besieged by "male evil".⁶

Asserting the existence of feminine and masculine "natures" is not new. In the past, this division served to justify the inequalities between women and men by referring to a so-called "feminine nature". During the Victorian era, "masculinity" and "femininity" were supposed to symbolise a whole set of opposite features. Men were said to be competitive,

4. See, for instance Charles Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars Fons. *The Seven Cultures of Capitalism; Value systems for creating wealth in the United States, Britain, Japan, Germany, France, Sweden, and the Netherlands* (London: Piatkus, 1994)

See also Edward Hall, T. & Milfred Reed. *Understanding Cultural Difference* (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press Inc, 1990). Also see the work of a historian: Costigliola, Frank. *France and the United States, The Cold Alliance, 1940-1990* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992).

5. *The American Prospect*. Dec 6 1999: 10.

6. Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood Is Powerful. An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage, 1970).

women exemplified co-operation; men were said to be able to use reason, women were said to be emotional; men claimed they were building an increasingly secular and amoral political and economic order, women sustained piety and morality.⁷

Feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan⁸ wrote *In a Different Voice* in 1982 and this book has been hailed since then as a feminist classic. Referring to male and female morality and identity, she argues that women's moral development is significantly different from that of men. Women remain less confident and dogmatic in their moral judgements, employ more concrete, less abstract categories of moral reasoning and hence show a concern for the individual over any great cause or principle. They display greater compassion and empathy (172). Gilligan does believe, implicitly in the superiority of women's moral sensibilities:

Women's development delineates the path not only to a less violent life but also to a maturity realised through interdependence and taking care.⁹ (172)

This analysis, quickly adopted as part of "differential feminism", which gives women the monopoly of emotion and affection, is akin to the discourses held by the New Right and antifeminist conservatives whose aim is the moralisation of the population. A number of feminist historians have questioned this logic, as Linda Gordon:

Some feminists come close to demonising men and endorsing the conservative stress on women's natural domesticity and lack of aggressiveness. And although difference on this view need not to be biological, the weight of this kind of talk, whether intended as feminist or as conservative, nearly always serves to adduce permanence and unchangeability to these gendered human types.¹⁰

or Linda Kerber :

I am haunted by the sense that we have heard this argument before, vested in different language. As far back as the ancient Greeks, "reason" was ascribed to men and "feeling" to women, while the Victorians thought men and women were so different they should inhabit separate "spheres".¹¹

Thus, just like during the Victorian era, contemporary feminists such as Robin Morgan, Susan Griffin, Catharine MacKinnon, Mary Daly, Carol Gilligan, celebrate women for their spiritual wealth, their humanism and pacifism. According to ecofeminists - ecofeminism emerged in the 80s and overlaps with differential feminism - only women can save the world from the nightmares of nuclear weaponry "which represents the untamed

7. Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty : A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989).

8. Voted "Woman of the Year by *Ms. Magazine* in 1984.

9. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982) 172.

10. Linda Gordon, "The Trouble with Difference," *Dissent*. Spring 1999: 42.

11. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 11, n°2. Winter 1986: 304.

force of male drives and male sexuality".¹² Women, because they live in harmony with nature which is female, can guarantee the future of life on earth through the "feminine mentality" and the force of maternal concerns. Woman's capacity for motherhood is presented as connecting her with what Adrienne Rich calls "the cosmic essence of womanhood".¹³ Antifeminist conservatives hold a similar discourse: they stand for a return to the traditional values of Victorian family life where "women would continue to quieten the unbridled ambition of the phallus".¹⁴ Even though there is an inversion of the socio-biology which is so popular on the right where nature is male, strong, violent, animal-like and bloody, these differing images of nature transposed to women and men define feminine and masculine "natures", opposed and distinct.

The reversal of the dichotomy "nature as male" or "nature as female" is recurring. It is linked to the impact of the biological and/or the social on the construction of genders. The intrinsic difference between genders that differential feminists claim today is an ideology that had been codified in the US long before the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. As a matter of fact, it is anchored in the feminist tradition that was expressed in the *Declaration of Sentiments* in Seneca Falls in 1848. There, women had already denounced what they considered the "false universality" of "all men". By adding "all women" to "all men", sexual difference became a constitutive principle of humanity. In the second half of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, women developed a similar conception of "feminine nature" to insist on the benefits that might be obtained by giving the right to vote to the "mothers of the nation who would purify the political and social world corrupted by men".¹⁵

Today, Susan Griffin and Adrienne Rich both emphasise the significance of female biology and recognise at the same time that the idea of "nature" is culturally constructed. They believe women must learn to trust their own biological instincts. This implies that they "must think through the body"¹⁶ and express "what is still wild in them".¹⁷

Feminist analysis has always confronted intractable dilemmas, mainly when it has to defend the theory according to which women's strength can stem from subordination and weakness. During the Victorian era, women as mothers and wives appeared as the good conscience of society. Nowadays, differential feminists, who advocate the superiority of "women's culture", sustain the Victorian conception of woman as the protector of morality. Women are supposed to be "better" than men and the world would be more human if they detained more power. Besides, they deny the fact that there has been a significant change as far as women's power and control over their lives are concerned. They put forward a fate that has remained unchanged for centuries. Women's powerlessness and victimisation make up their *herstory*.

12. Robin Morgan, "Feminism Is the Key of Our Survival and Transformation," *The Anatomy of Freedom* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1982) 283.

13. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (London: Virago, 1977)

14. Roger Scruton, "The Case Against Feminism," *The Observer* [London] 22 May 1983.

15. Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Nancy F Scott in her essay *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, shows that unity between women tends to disappear when women claim their individual rights, 1987.

16. Rich, 1977: 39.

17. Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature* (London: The Women's Press, 1984) 217.

The idealisation of the female as more virtuous has as its inevitable complement the denunciation of the male as "vicious". The issue of men's violence and of its timeless, universal inevitability has moved to the centre of differential feminist thought. According to feminist scholar Andrea Dworkin, "men commit acts of forced sex against women systematically, and the women's movement has been based upon that recognition".¹⁸ She has a terrorising rhetoric on "the systematic sadism of men":

One can know everything and still be unable to accept the fact that sex and murder are fused in male consciousness, so that one without the immanent possibility of the other is unthinkable and impossible. One can know everything and still, at bottom, refuse to accept that the annihilation of women is the source of meaning and identity for men.¹⁹

The passionate intensity of Andrea Dworkin's denunciation of men is not only supported but surpassed by feminist theologian Mary Daly who speaks of "the polluting and contaminating evil of men's rule which is the root of rapism, racism, gynocide, genocide and ultimately biocide". Relentlessly in her famous book *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, she insists upon the "elemental purity of women" and "the permanent pestilence of men (the sovereigns of the sado-states)". She declares in her conclusion:

Males' need for female energy is necrophilia - love for those victimised into a state of living death.²⁰

For Mary Daly, reality is reduced to language. Women must subvert or castrate the male meanings of words to "unearth their buried female meanings". In reclaiming the "old meanings" of "witch", "crone", "hag" and "spinster", women are supposed to rediscover their affinity with nature:

For we are rooted as are animals and trees, wind and seas, in the Earth's substance. Our origins are in her elements. Men are the lifeblockers, radically separated from the natural harmony of the universe.²¹

Men's separation from nature is so total that "it is a trap to imagine women should save men from the dynamics of demonic possession".²²

Such mystic discourse, emblematic of feminist theologians who advocate a religion based on meditation and female deities, opened the way to "Goddess worship", a trend that

18. Eliz Wilson. "Interview with Andrea Dworkin," *Feminist Review* 11. 1982: 24.

19. Andrea Dworkin. "Taking Action," in L. Lederer, *Take Back the Night* (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1980) 288.

20. Mary Daly, *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 59.

21. Mary Daly, *Pure Lust* (London: The Women's Press, 1984) 3.

22. *ibid* 363.

became popular in the 1980s, with ecofeminism.²³ The "Goddess Reawakening" echoes the second Great Awakening in which women participated during the Victorian era, a time when religion feminised strongly; then, the idea of "women's superiority" strengthened as the ideals of femininity and Christianity seemed to combine. The women who in 1834 created the *American Female Moral Reform Society* whose objective was to eradicate prostitution considered as a threat to society, fully developed their hypothesis as to the "superior nature" of women. They denounced "the predatory nature of the American male: reckless, bold and drenched in sin, whose sexual appetite caused the downfall of innocent women".²⁴ In the 1870s, the Temperance Movement represented a similar attempt at controlling male behaviour. Women associated alcohol with men's "natural" violence, irresponsibility and immorality.

The perception the "natural behaviour" of males has had an influence on the women's movement. For Karen De Crow, former president of the *National Organization for Women* -an organization that advocates a liberal ideology-since the 1980s, there has emerged an anti-men discourse among feminists²⁵, and those who openly declare their heterosexuality may be accused of having a "paradoxical identity".²⁶ Thus, Daphne Patai, a Professor in the Women's Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts has written a book in response to what she considers "the growing hysteria" concerning sexual harassment legislation. In her opinion, relations between women and men are presently "contaminated by legal, social and institutional forces that demonise heterosexual men and identify them as the enemy".²⁷

In the same way, differential feminists focus on the "rape culture" in which all women are considered as potential victims of all men; this rhetoric emerged in the 1970s with radical feminists like Susan Brownmiller and it has been developed just as fiercely nowadays by feminist scholars. We can learn indeed from an essay about male dominance by Catharine MacKinnon:

Perhaps the wrong of rape has proven so difficult to articulate because the unquestionable starting point has been that rape is defined as distinct from intercourse.²⁸

23. According to Rene Denfeld, universalist feminist critical of this religious "awakening", "Dozens of feminist books have been published in the past few years on goddess worship. Feminist magazines and newspapers regularly praise the virtues of this religion, while a recent crop of spiritual magazines are devoted solely to the cause." Rene Denfeld, *The New Victorians* (New York: Warner Books, 1995) 130.

24. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast and the Militant Woman : A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Victorian America", *American Quarterly* 23 Oct. 1971: 562-84.

25. See the interview of Karen De Crow by Jack Kammer in her essay *Good Will Toward Men: Women Talk Candidly about the Balance of Power between the Sexes*. 1994: 58.

26. Alison Thomas, "The Heterosexual Feminist, a Paradoxical Identity" in *Heterosexuality*, 1997.

27. Daphne Patai, *Heterophobia, Sexual Harassment and the Future of Feminism*, 1998.

28. Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: Towards Feminist Jurisprudence" in Sandra Harding, *Feminism and Method* (Indiana: Indiana Press University, 1987) 142.

This generalisation is emblematic of the extremist discourse held by a number of American feminists whose definition of rape no longer includes the use of strength or threat. Women are collectively thought of as victims and men as torturers. Thus, Marilyn French in her book *The War Against Women* declares:

He can beat or kill the woman he claims to love; he can rape women whether mate, acquaintance, or stranger; he can rape or sexually molest his daughters, nieces, stepchildren or the children of a woman he claims to love. The vast majority of men in the world do one or more of the above.²⁹

Many feminists rise up against such assertions and question the theories on rape as Wendy Kaminer who notes:

To suggest, as some activists do that we should "believe the women" in rape cases is to endorse conviction by accusation and imbue prosecutors with awesome, unconstitutional power.³⁰

It seems likely that it was partly the problems inherent in presenting rape as the root cause of male power and "natural violence" which led the radical strand of feminism to focus on pornography in the 1980s. As a matter of fact, Robin Morgan suggested "pornography is the theory, rape is the practice", establishing a parallel with the lesbian slogan "feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice".³¹ In her essay entitled *Pornography, Men Possessing Women*, Andrea Dworkin declares:

The penis, as a symbol of terror is even more significant than the gun, the knife, the bomb, the fist (...) Women will know that they are free when pornography no longer exists".³²

Here the penis serves as a weapon to colonise and subdue women. The practical implication of such a perspective is that it restricts the focus of feminist activism to an exclusive emphasis on the sexual, and the focus on the sexual to the issue of "male violence".

When campaigning for legislation directed at regulating pornographic expression, anti-pornography feminists worked with Stop-ERA activists and members of the Moral Majority whose agenda was explicitly antifeminist and misogynist.³³ The discourse on the

29. Marilyn French, *The War Against Women* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992) 184.

30. Wendy Kaminer, "Feminists, Puritans and Statists", *Dissent* Spring 1999: 14.

31. Morgan, in Lynn Segal, *Is the Future Female? Troubled Thoughts on Contemporary Feminism* (London: Virago Press, 1991) 106.

32. New York: Plume, 1989. 235.

33. This faction proposed ordinances in many cities where the proposal was enacted. It was opposed locally by feminists, by Black politicians, by the gay community and by the few Democrats on the city council. The overwhelmingly Republican council passed this "feminist law". So, women made an alliance with conservatives whose agenda was explicitly antifeminist and misogynist.

"nature" of men recalls that of the social-purity campaigners in the 19th century who allied themselves with conservatives whose goal was to enforce morality and who finally shaped the laws and the ways they were enforced.³⁴

Today, young women, particularly on campuses are supposed to support the censorship of sexual material that will inevitably cause violence against women. But, as Rene Denfeld noted:

By blaming sexual material for sexual violence, current feminists invoke the Victorian-era belief that sexuality is inherently evil and any display of it must be squashed.³⁵

In rejoicing in female qualities, differential feminists assume there is an essential female nature, an essence of womanhood that determines these qualities. They suggest that universal male domination is rooted in a biologically determined male aggression, which in turn, is the bedrock of gender differences in all societies. Male dominance is everywhere and always the same:

Male aggression, as we know it today is not simply the product of culture, the legacy of patriarchal religion, or whatever doorstep that feminists have tended to lay the evil at, but rather it is the result of the decision to hunt animals which men made at least half a million years ago... What prevented early women from taking the male path to violence ? Our biology, simply put.³⁶

Hence, gender differences, according to this kind of vision come down to biology again: gender roles are "natural" as a product of underlying biology. Such biological determinism argues against the possibility of change, denies the social context of men and women's lives and involve massive generalisations.

We do not want to suggest here that the biological is totally absent from human behavior; but if it has to be taken into account, the biological can never be separated from or be wholly determining of experience and behavior. A feminism which emphasises only the dangers to women from men, which insists upon the essential differences between women's and men's inner being, between women and men's "natural" urges and experience of the world, leaves no scope for transforming the relations between women and men. Feminism of this kind encourages a reactionary politics because it places women outside all mainstream political struggles.

There are wide differences between humans, some are stronger than others or smarter or more vulnerable to specific diseases or more attractive, lighter or darker. These undeniable biological differences are not invoked in an egalitarian, non-racist society. Politics and the fight for equality and respect cannot be based on biological differences. Genes or supposedly innate abilities do not, in democracies, determine who is a citizen. Even if one could prove that there are indeed undeniable biological differences between

34. Lisa Duggan. "Feminist Historians And Anti-pornography Campaigns: An Overview", in Duggan, Lisa and D. Hunter, *Sex Wars* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 70.

35. Rene Denfeld, *The New Victorians* (New York: Warner Books, 1995) 13.

36. Laurel Holliday, *The Violent Sex: Male Psychobiology and the Evolution of Consciousness* (New York: Bluestocking Books, 1978).

men and women, it would still be highly problematic to base a whole politics upon biology. The so-called biological, and hence intellectual, superiority of men was spurious; turning the tables to point out the so-called superiority of women is the continuation of a discourse of inequality not its subversion or ironizing. In the past women were said to be less logical and less impartial so they could not be mathematicians or judges, now that countless women have shown they could think mathematically and be good judges it would indeed be ironical if, because of their nature, men were said to be unable to express their emotions, use language poetically or show psychological insight. A majority of men are not rapists, not violent, not robots deprived of feelings. Some men are said to have a large feminine part, some women to be quite masculine and everyone is a composite. The return of nature is an attempt to fix and rigidify identities and concepts. It is politically reactionary in the full sense of the term.

In all western societies men are, on average, more violent than women, more likely to end up in jail, more likely to die young. Even if there are or might be good biological explanations for this, nature cannot totally trump culture. American women do indeed commit far fewer violent crimes than American men but they are on a par with men in Europe. European men, for their part, are far more likely to be violent than European women. Clearly thus, both genes and culture seem to play a part. The new nature defenders within and without feminism tend to tarnish a whole sex with a broad brush and to paint an idealised and essentialist picture of the new first sex. The whole body of research about gender seems to have flown out the window, sexual identity seems to be destiny.

Nature is now invoked to point out the innate brutality of men or their psychological limitations. The rhetoric of inferiority is the same though the target has changed. Though there are historical continuities between, for instance, the *Temperance Movement* or the Victorian age and some brands of feminism in the late 20th century one has to wonder about the reasons for the apparent reversal of positions within mainstream feminism. How can the targets of an old biological determinism now claim that a new biological determinism has come to their rescue and proves their superiority where the old one proved their inferiority? This discursive exchange however is not a rarity but rather more often than not the rule in the area of politics. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* deals with this well-known phenomenon of the former revolutionaries borrowing the boots of the previous masters. Often some leaders within ethnic minorities fighting for respect and dignity end up setting up a reverse racist theory, which is a mirror image of the one they attack. The *Nation of Islam*, from its inception to Farrakhan, is another example of reverse racism, the "blue-eyed devils" took the place of the "niggers" of white racists but the demeaning rhetoric of racist rejection remained in place. Could it be that some feminists have taken a leaf out of the old male sexist book or that they want to play the same game with a few modifications in the rules? Could it be that, in the same way as reverse racist demagogues of the Al Sharpton type use the guilt of decent anti-racist whites to achieve their aims, some feminists use the guilt of decent men to make a blanket condemnation of all men? But clearly the biological game can also be played once again by dominant males, the so-called alpha males that even Naomi Wolf seems to eulogise.³⁷

37. See "The He Hormone" by Andrew Sullivan in *The New York Times Magazine* April 2, 2000. The new biological discourse is ready to legitimate man's violent behavior (it's in their genes, they can't help it and testosterone makes them competitive and efficient).

Just as African Americans felt frustrated when it became obvious that legal equality did not translate into socio-economic parity and were tempted to shift their political strategies, feminists may have tried different approaches to reach their aims. The egalitarian, universalist discourse that had been the basis of so many fights proved somewhat disappointing for, in many areas, women have not yet achieved equality and parity with men. The return of nature and the political rehabilitation of biological determinism in feminist thought may correspond to a change of tactics. In the fight against colonialism when a large group of people in the metropole feel guilty about imperialism and colonialism, anti-imperialists or freedom fighters often resorted to a guilt-based tactic. Indeed Shelby Steele argues that it is now the case among some African American activists. This discourse emerges at a late stage in the struggle against imperialism or racism, just before victory, that is just before decolonisation or just before the end of legal discrimination. Ironically enough the change of course and guilt-inducing radicalisation is a sign of victory for the former rhetoric. Anti-colonialism did not triumph along the lines advocated by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* but his writings and radicalisation ensured the victory of more moderate anti-colonialists (more moderate here means that they refused to become reverse racists and therefore anti-white in an essentialist way).

One possible interpretation of the reactionary return of biology could paradoxically therefore be quite positive. Egalitarian feminism has won, polite discourse now excludes sexist statements and behaviours. Every day reality though is still disappointing and there are still many cases of sexual harassment, condescension and domination where women are victimised. The discrepancy between the legal, discursive and political victory of egalitarian feminism and the still unequal reality might explain the radical resurgence of an extreme discourse. This new radicalism, on account of its very radicalism, may transform the discursive victory of egalitarian feminism into more successes in the real world. The reverse sexism of some feminists by causing a reaction may lend more credibility to feminist discourses that appear more moderate, less anti-men and therefore more acceptable; that would be yet another example of radicals guaranteeing the victory of moderates. In that sense the critical appraisal of Nature's return could be accompanied by a kind of cautious welcome. The old biological determinism was discredited, the new one is likely to be too and thus the way away from essentialism towards more equality and opportunity might be more open.

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Violent but superachieving males and gentle, co-operative women who are therefore superior. Yet, we've heard it before.

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