

MOTHER NATURE AND THE NASHIRA ECO-VILLAGE

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In 2013 Heide Goettner Abendroth was invited to Colombia to give her opinion about the eco-village Nashira where 88 women were striving to build a model for a modern matriarchal society.

According to Heide, "Matriarchal societies are consciously built upon maternal values and motherly work, and this is why they are much more realistic than patriarchies. They are, on principle, need-oriented. Their precepts aim to meet everyone's needs with the greatest benefit. Great care is taken to provide a balance between genders, among generations, and between humans and nature. So, in matriarchies, motherhood which originates as a biological fact is transformed into a cultural model. This model is much more appropriate to the human condition than the way patriarchies conceptualize motherhood and use it to make women, and especially mothers, into slaves".

Ecology is a word derived from ancient Greek, "oikos" meaning house, and "logos", meaning "reason" or "plan". It is therefore a science that studies the relationships of living beings with each other and with their habitat.

The Nashira project's first challenge was to acquire a farm where a group of women could build their own houses, and with sufficient space so that they could grow at least some of their own food. They acquired legal title to a house of their own from which nobody could evict them, least of all their male companions or husbands. The land empowered them. Their houses were, symbolically and metaphorically wombs to which they could welcome a companion on their own terms, and also thereby control and manage the exercise of their own sexuality.

Appropriately and coincidentally the farm, that was donated for building the project, was in exactly the same area, where two thousand years ago there flourished an indigenous

community, known as The Malagana Culture or Kansaterwa, which archeological evidence suggests was a matriarchal society.

These archeological discoveries are very similar to those found by Maria Gimbutas in Europe, which led her to believe that some of the first human societies were matriarchal.

The Malagana culture worshipped an Earth Mother. Women, breast feeding and giving birth, were central to their religion, as can be seen from the clay and gold figures found in recently uncovered burial sites. Ceramic figures of multiple breasts and the moment of childbirth shown in a gold pectoral, where a child is pushing himself with his hands to be born, were objects of worship, together with the sun and the moon.

European Colonization was accompanied by religious catechization, and destroyed intimate relationship with Mother Earth as Vandana Shiva emphasizes in her writings. Colonialism established a price for captured men as slaves and for the bodies of women as sex objects for the use of patriarchal invaders. They devalued motherhood and established patriarchal paradigms that still dominate and subvert the indigenous communities that strive to preserve their ancestral traditions. The Cogi, indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia are sometimes considered by scholars to be a matriarchal community, but in some aspects their traditions have been altered and hijacked by patriarchal paradigms. The Mamo or Shaman is the all powerful head of the community and chooses a husband for his daughters according to their usefulness to him or the family.

The Nashira eco-village, where mothers rule is a modern effort to revive ancestral indigenous customs, based on the tradition of a matriarchal society and giving back to mothers the control of the land. 88 women were given the opportunity to create a sustainable eco-village.

They grow a high proportion of their own food on organic principles including plantain, sacha inchi, chirimoyas, grapes and many more tropical fruits and vegetables. The sun provides the energy to cook in a solar kitchen, and in contrast to conventional patriarchal communities, neighbors give and receive gifts according to their needs and those of their children.

The houses in Nashira were built with ecologically friendly materials. All households are headed by women and most actually helped to build their own houses. Many households consist of women only. Yamile Perdomo has 7 children and her first child was born when she was just 13. The father of her children had to be expelled from Nashira for repeated drunken and violent behavior. In some cases the eldest son or brother has taken on the role of the father, as in the case of Elsy Martinez' family. As an open door community, children and the elderly are never alone. The activities of the women of Nashira include making pottery, in some cases using the Malagana designs. Another group makes hand made paper and objects from papiermache. Organic waste is composted using worms. Groups of women collect and recycle inorganic waste from the surrounding neighborhoods using an electric van given to them by the Palmira municipality. Metal, plastic, glass and other inorganic materials are stored, sorted and recycled to make new products or sold for reuse in industry. Many of the women also raise free range chickens, turkeys, ducks and quails.

All administrative decisions are taken by consensus. The consumption of alcohol is not encouraged and men who have incurred in violent acts against their partners or children have been expelled. There is little crime in Nashira. Violence against women has been almost eradicated. Nashira is proud to be a community with open doors, where women support each other and men have developed a new culture of love and respect for women. Childcare and maintaining the eco-village are tasks, shared through "mingas" or collective work assignments. The floor of the Agora our meeting place is one example, and the solar clock, which was made by the young people of Nashira, is another. The fountain of the Pasha Mama was the result of collective work and the

composting toilet also, whose walls were made using sand filled plastic bottles collected as rubbish during the peace marches of a few years ago.

In Nashira we are very proud of Ruby Hurtado. She is a single mother now aged 19 and has won a scholarship to study law at a leading local university. She is the first person in her family to be able to go to university. In its 18 years of existence, the Nashira eco-village has contributed by changing traditional paradigms. Women are respected and unwanted adolescent pregnancies are no longer the norm. Women have an opportunity to achieve their true potential, freed from many of the traditional obstacles that were and are a consequence of patriarchal norms.