

The Mother

I am inspired by the realization that the Earth is fully connected, life springing from and returning to the same source. Through soil, the beings of this planet are connected; life and death are one; the systems of earth intertwine. I discovered these beautiful truths. I am consistently in awe of the reality of Earth. In turn, I have become attached to the concept of the Mother Earth goddess, honoring the Earth as the holy source of life. I have also become deeply disillusioned by capitalist-patriarchal society and its basis in male-centric religion. This system is detrimental to both the planet and women. As my anger at the reality of our societal structure increases, so does my need to reclaim the Earth as a Sacred Mother, embracing spirituality and morality based on ecological principles to create a healthy future.

I used dirt to create a Mother Goddess figure, intended to be reminiscent of the figurines from Neolithic European civilizations with Earth Mother centric belief systems. Soil depicts the Earth Mother because soil is the ultimate source of life, a representation of connection, and aligned to the concept of the Mother Earth. She sits upon embroidery, representing the cross-section of a large tree, representative of the power of nature. These are both spiritual symbols and physical elements of Earth.

This installation expresses a deep spiritual reverence for the power of the Earth and for female power. I intend to communicate my own understanding of the world and encourage awe of nature in others. The Mother Earth goddess is critical to understanding how to untangle a detrimental patriarchal-capitalist system towards a stable equitable future.

Colleen R.
Maryland

Earth The Mother: Reclaiming The Mother Goddess

Colleen R.



This essay addresses the concept of the Sacred Mother Earth figure and explores how religion and spirituality dictate power structures and the nature of a society. I explore unity in nature through the lens of science, look at how the unified earth has been venerated as a Mother figure and how this benefits a society. I then trace the destruction of the female-centric spirituality in favor of the shift to a male god and the exploitation of women and the Earth. I address the need for a reclamation of the Mother Earth figure to create a sustainable stable future. The body of this essay utilizes a flowing poetic prose format in order to express the emotionality of the issue, while the footnotes take the place of more formal research.

Earth The Mother: Reclaiming The Mother Goddess

All is one. This we know. All things do rise from the same soil, all energy from the same source. All life comes from her. Once upon a time, this was known. Once upon a time, God was a Woman. The Goddess was the Mother, and the Mother was the Earth. When the Mother was sacred, life thrived. Then comes God the Father. Life is unbalanced. The Mother is exploited, the Woman subjugated, the Earth destroyed. We must remember our source, change our course.

She Is One

All things do spring from the same Earth, this we know. All life the same water, the same air, the same soil. She is the source, the body. We are part of Her. We walk every day upon the very source of life. The soil beneath our feet is the tie, the bridge. Through soil the beings of this planet are connected, life and death are one, the systems of earth intertwine.¹ First into the soil comes the rock. The solid rock of this planet is broken down by the living soil, and these nutrients are pulled into the cycle.² Out of this soil grows life. The plant grows, and she is connected, feeding on this nutrition, pulling from the water, the air of this earth, the energy of the sun. At her life's end, it is seen that there is no end. The body of the plant is part of the body of the earth and returns to the soil, and the soil is healthy. The seeds of this plant and many others then can grow again out of this soil, in one of many circles. Here the soil lies between life and death, the source and the ending for a life. The animal feeds off the plant. The animal thus gets the energy that came from the sun, the nutrients from the solid rock of earth, and is too connected. Perhaps this animal is eaten by another, and the energy is once again transferred. The animal too returns to the soil at life's end. In all stories, the body becomes the land, and the land creates life. The soil is the rock, is the living, the once living, the source of life. The Earth turns as a wheel in cycles, all things connected, balanced, all things breathing as one. Life allowing for life. All things are one.

When The Mother Was Sacred

The first sacred being was the Mother and her worship spread wide and lasted long³. They saw the wheel turn. They saw life come folding out of the rich soil in the summer, saw life emerging from, being nurtured by, creating, becoming, being Earth. They saw too life come screaming out of a woman's body. They saw this and they called her Mother. Mother, what is new, Mother what is old, Mother as she folds life back into her soil and creates it anew. Although she wore many faces, the people of old saw her, the power of life in nature.

¹ Soil functions as a "vast interface zone that covers much of the Earth's land surface where the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the biosphere, and the geosphere all meet." (New Scientist 2018)

² "For plants, and many animals that consume them, nutrition depends on a number of vital elements such as nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and calcium, which they require in various amounts. Processes such as rock and mineral weathering and breakdown of organic material release these elements into the soil water. They become available for use by soil organisms and by plants, which absorb them through their roots" (New Scientist, 2018)

³ Female-centric Goddess religion was fairly universal for much of Early human history. According to Monica Sjoo in *The Great Cosmic Mother*, "This concept of a female earth as the source of cyclic birth, life, death, and rebirth underlies all mythological and religious symbology; it is the source of all religious belief. It is important to grasp the time dimension involved: *God was female for at least the first 200,000 years of human life on earth.*"

The peoples of Old Europe saw her.⁴ The Mother was the creator of all, the symbol of all unity in nature. She was life, and fertility, and destruction, the embodiment of the great powers and cycles of this Earth.⁵ They learned to reap the land and saw that their food did come from her.⁶ They worshipped the Mother as a goddess of fertility, of the body and the land, the giver of life and of food. We see this as they created the figure of Her body, the woman's body.⁷ The figure shows her power, shows her as the origin. The woman was deeply woven with the land. When the god figure was the Woman, was the Earth, life was sacred. They built a civilization where life and creation stood over violence and death and they thrived. They were intertwined with the patterns of the land, got all they needed from Her. They created a true society, with strength and culture. They created art and beauty.⁸ They understood that life comes from Woman, and respected the Mother. Women stood strong in their structure, respected, and all people stood equal.⁹ Subordination of women had no place in their lives. Nor did violence.¹⁰ When the Mother was sacred, life thrived.¹¹

Then God Said

A new structure is born, all power is His now. Connections were denied, severed. The power was no longer in creation but in violence. He was the warrior. Death was his. Creation was his too. All power is His.¹² The earth is just something created by Him. She has no inherent power. She herself does not create.¹³ Plants only spring from the ground on His command.¹⁴ And

⁴ As discovered by archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, the religion of Neolithic Europe was the religion of the goddess. Out of thousands of excavated images, there were hardly any male deity figures. (Maria Mies, 2018) As Mary Daly says, "The fact is that the ancient world knew no gods. Fatherhood was not honored." (1978)

⁵ According to Marija Gimbutas, "[The Goddess was a] product of a sedentary, matrilinear community, encompassing archetypal unity and multiplicity of feminine nature. She was giver of life and all that promotes fertility, and at the same time she was the wielder of the destructive powers of nature" (1974)

⁶ The advent of agriculture brought on a deeper sense of wonder about the regeneration of life as they "began to observe the phenomena of the miraculous Earth more that the previous hunter-fisher had done." (Marija Gimbutas, 1974)

⁷ The Earth Mother "found expression in numerous old clay statues which archeologists found all over Europe." These statues all shared similar features of "big round breasts, symbolizing the giver of food, a big round belly and pronounced vaginal triangle- the source of the generative powers of the Big Mother." This symbolized that "she is the giver of life. The forms of her body mean that she is not only the creator of human life, but of plant and animal life as well." (Maria Mies 2018)

⁸ Old Europeans had towns with high concentrations of people elaborate houses and temples, a sacred script, artisans with specifications in ceramics, weaving, and metallurgy, and an elaborate network of trade routes. (Gimbutas 1974)

⁹ According to Joan Marcer "in Marija's view, Old European symbols, burial practices, and domestic ritual practices reflect a sacred cosmology and the centrality of women's activities within a mother kinship system... In *Civilization of The Goddess*, she points out that, while women were respected and honored, the sexes were more or less on equal footing."

¹⁰ Again referencing Gimbutas, Maria Mies says, "the Old European civilization does not reveal traces of a society based on warfare and conquest. In the excavations of tombs and cities no weapons to systematically kill humans- such as swords, spears, bows and arrows- were found. There were no strong fortifications of the cities or towns or villages to protect them from enemies. According to Gimbutas, Old European civilization 'was in the main peaceful, sedentary, matrifocal, matrilinear and sex-egalitarian'"

¹¹ In a system of female-centric spirituality, society functions in a more balanced, sustainable way.

¹² "In the struggle to achieve equal status for women, in a society still permeated by the values and moralities of Judeo-Christian beliefs (which have penetrated deeply into even the most secular aspects of our contemporary civilization) we soon realize that a thorough examination played in the initial and continual oppression and subjugation of women—and the reasons for this." (Merlin Stone)

¹³ Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

the animals are His creation.¹⁵ And plant life only thrives because Man tills the soil.¹⁶ And Woman is created by the Father God, from the body of Man. She is created only to be his helper, his wife, his subordinate, made to be dominated. Creation is ours no longer but His.¹⁷ In the male-centric world, all power must be his, women must be fully defeated, so even this, even creation is his.¹⁸ Woman is cursed for seeking knowledge, cursed to oppression, to subjugation, to pain. The ability to create life is God's, and God's curse upon Woman. She is cursed to be ruled by Man. She is His.^{19 20}

All power must be his, and so Woman is deemed inferior, and the land is deemed to be nothing but a resource. Woman is created to be His. The powers of woman and nature are denied. We may not know our bodies. We may not control our bodies.²¹ We may not speak of our bodies. The woman is a sinful being. Our power is denied. Our bodies are His. Woman, of course, was only created as Adam's helper.

Earth is created to be His. The power of the Earth is too denied. The soil is not the holy source but a dirty thing. The Earth is no longer the Sacred Mother, the Holy Source. The Holy Mother Earth is not only obscured but actively suppressed. When God is the Father, Woman and Earth are His, both only to be exploited. The land is a dead thing God created for Man, and Man takes advantage. Earth is there to be owned by Man. Lines are drawn upon the sand, this land is his and his and his. Land not to be loved but to be divided, torn apart, reaped to create things, to create capital. Earth is a whole being no longer, sacred no longer, but now a series of parts. The land is only a resource now. It is his God-given right to turn to land into a commodity, into capital. The inherent logic of the Mother's cycle is obscured. The Earth as the living planet, ever-cyclical mother source, the reality that life comes from Woman, is obscured to make way for male power. The reality that all things must come to an end, that death is a part of life, is destroyed. The cycle is replaced with the ever-expanding, ever-consuming patriarchal-capitalist

¹⁴ Genesis 1:11, "Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"; and it was so.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:25, "God made the beast of the earth according to its kind"

¹⁶ Genesis 2:4, "This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground"

¹⁷ According to Maria Mies, "Man the Warrior considers himself as the creator of life on Earth, of plants, animals, even of children. The father is considered to be Creator and the beginning of human life... Here we see the dilemma patriarchal man. If they want to have sons they need women, mothers. Without women they are sterile.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:20, "But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept, and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

¹⁹ Genesis 3:16, "To the woman, He said: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.'"

²⁰ In the eyes of the patriarchy, women are made to submit to men. As Merlin Stone says, "We are also made to understand that, as a result of this act, [consumption of the forbidden fruit,] it was decreed by God that woman must submit to the dominance of man—who was at that time divinely presented with the right to rule over her—from that moment until now.

²¹ In patriarchal society, women are routinely subjugated and denied control over our own bodies and lives. Through time women have been controlled through actions such as sex slavery, raped and made to bear children. As technology has developed, this has extended into 'pro-life' thought and denying women's access to birth control. One of the undeniable powers of women is the ability to bear children, but this has not stopped male forces from continually co-opting the female body.

system. A system is created with infinite greed, where profit is king and there is no place for compassion, a finite earth is destroyed by the capitalist machine.²² In this system of arbitrary money, the land is not given any value and consumption of Earth is unfettered.²³ No second thought is given to the deep value of a being or a material in the living system of Mother Earth because she has been overcome.²⁴

The result of this system based on male power, male ownership, is widespread destruction and violence. The Earth is being ripped apart, poisoned. Women are subjugated and oppressed. And why not when there is no living Earth. Why not? We no longer remember we are part of Her. God's green earth. Don't you remember? This green earth was God. Although it tears at you, you too came screaming out of your mother's womb. Every breath you've taken is from this earth. Every ounce of your energy grew out of the soil. We must remember where we came from, realign ourselves to the reality of the Living Earth.

Mother, I Know Thee

There is no future in His structure, based on the destruction of Women and the Earth. While Man is God, while His system reigns, the Earth will continue on a path toward destruction, and Woman cannot be free. It is time for Earth to be our Sacred Mother again. We need to reach our hands into Her soil and remember Her truths. We must let Her be Sacred, let Her truths be our values. If only we could remember Her we could remember; Life is deeply sacred. All things are connected. The land and the Earth are unfathomably valuable. All life is equally valuable. All life comes from Woman and the land. The Mother is the holy source. We are part of the Earth, owe all to Her. We owe our lives to Her and will return to her at life's end, part of her cycles. Her potent truths must be spread. We need to twine this knowledge of Her into every inch of human truth, relearn how to live within the cycles, within the balance of Earth instead of fighting her at every turn. We must reclaim the power of the Sacred Mother Earth, take back female strength and power, and begin to mend human destruction caused by His ways.

The work has already begun. We women yell our anger, work bit by bit for necessary change. Some have begun the work to heal our broken relationship to the planet. We see that the Earth and women have been exploited in tandem and we have begun to fight.²⁵ We see Her, know

²² By nature, "Capitalism must expand or induce economic hardship. Its requirement to expand is, in the long run, incompatible with the finite limits of the planet." (David Klein 2015) Capitalist patriarchy is a truly destructive force and is at the core of human planetary destruction, destroying this earth to fuel a created need for unsustainable consumption. As Mies says, "Thus our living Mother Earth is transformed into dead matter, material, raw material, which is necessary to produce new 'things'." Capitalism requires infinite consumption to survive, but there is no room for infinite consumption on a finite

²³ Capitalism creates an abstraction of value in a monetary system that does not value natural resources corresponding to their value to the Earth, or to life's continuation, but instead on ease of extraction and ease of profit. This perpetuates consumption of natural resources at deeply unsustainable rates.

²⁴ As stated by Maria Mies, "'Modern development' means the 'ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature.' It means the transformation of the living earth, of the soil, into a dead resource for industrialisation."

²⁵ Women have been fighting for liberation in the form of feminist movements for decades, and continue to do so. Many people have also been fighting against the continuous destruction of the planet, fighting to return to sustainable practices. As long as these oppressive systems have been in place, we have been fighting against them. A movement has arisen, fighting against oppressive patriarchal systems and its effect on women and the planet. The ecofeminist movement combines ecological concerns with feminist thought, a movement pushing back on the parallel exploitation of women and the Earth.

Her.²⁶ A powerful force arises, fueled by our love for Her beauty and our anger for His destruction. This fight must continue, must spread, must push on. We must escape His bounds and create a new society, based on Her truths. If Earth becomes the Sacred Mother once again, life may thrive once again.

The truth of Earth is that She is One, She is the source of all life. Connection and unity is the reality of Earth. Early humanity saw this and called her Mother, and was aligned to her truths. A society of the Mother was strong, peaceful, and productive, with women in a place of honor. This belief was destroyed and replaced by God the Father, with Man as the ultimate power. The powers of Woman and the Earth are denied to make way for Him. The Earth is nothing but a dead thing created for Man to reap, Woman is nothing but Man's helper, created by God. Women and the Earth are exploited, subjugated, destroyed. In order to reclaim female power, and live once again in harmony with the planet we must reclaim the power of the Sacred Mother Earth.

²⁶ There is a modern movement of female-centric spirituality, women reclaiming the Goddess figure to reclaim female power and the sacred feminine. We see the connections between spirituality and societal wellbeing and understand the history of Goddess worship, referencing those times and creating a new spiritual movement with feminist political connections. We understand that, as Monica Sjoo says, "Based in matricide, the death of all nature, and the utter exploitation of women, Western culture has now run itself into the ground, and there is no other way but to return to the Mother who gives us life. If we are to survive we have to attune yet again to the spirits of nature, and we must learn to "hear" the voices of the ancestors who speak to us from their Otherworld realms."

Works Cited

Downing, C. (1984). *The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine*. New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company.

Griffin, S. (1778). *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.

Mies, M (2018). Mother Earth. *Women Will Save The Earth* (pp. 154- 160). London, UK: Zed Books

New Scientist. (2018). *This Is Planet Earth*. Boston, MA: Nicholas Brearley Publishing.
Downing, C. (1984).

Sjoo, M. (1987). *The Great Cosmic Mother*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.

Stone, M. (1976). *When God Was A Woman*. London, UK: Virago Press.

The Goddess: Mythological Images of the Feminine. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company.

The Holy Bible (King James Version). (n.d.).