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Ecofeminist Ideology of Petra Kelly: The Challenges of Modern Political Thought¹

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Abstract

Petra Kelly (1947-1992) has remained recorded in history as one of the true icons of modern German and European environmental movement. Combining the ideas of feminism, peace, nonviolence, ecology (environmental protection) and social justice, she has managed to reconcile these seemingly opposing ideas and merge them into one specific type of ideology that was the guiding idea of the German Green Party until the mid-nineties of the last century. This is not the case of an eclectic kind of ideology, the simple merging of ideas into a single functional unit policy, but of an ideology that is based on the notion that the nuclear age, political, social, gender, class and other differences are something that inhibits humanity in its real progress. At the same time, Petra Kelly has shown that true feminism is not necessarily something that is obscure or something that is politically incorrect. Modern feminism, as it was propagated by Petra Kelly, in compliance with environmental political idea, the idea of peace, nonviolence, anti-nuclear policy and the idea of direct democracy, represents an ideology that, by its political radicalism and its strong criticism of the capitalist society, stands side by side with ecologism. "Cassandra of the nuclear apocalypse", "The Ulrike Meinhof of the eighties", in spite of all her accomplishments for the formation of the German Greens, unfortunately, remained forgotten in the political thought and political practice of the party.

Keywords: ecofeminism, nonviolence, social justice, ecology, ideology

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The story of Petra Kelly is a story of a policy, utopia which could have become a reality. This is also the story of a political legacy that almost thirty years later has a chance to go out again into the public arena that is saturated with empty promises that have long been demystified. The name Petra Kelly is inevitably linked to the beginning of the story about the Greens, ecologism, green political activism. However, any exposure of biography of Petra Kelly has a risk of taking a pathetic turn, where Kelly is usually presented as a victim of the system, politics and political friends and associates. No doubt, she really was all that.

The question that we want to launch in this paper is what is actually the political thought of Petra Kelly and what are its values today. Since her death the world has gone through dramatical changes and so the second question that imposes itself upon us is whether her ideas are as meaningful as they once were, whether they are run over by time or are they now more current than they once were.

Petra Kelly has presented with her life from the beginning a specific contradiction. Born in Germany, in Ginzburg, where war criminal Josef Mengele was born, Kelly has carried with her unwarranted moral burden of responsibility of the post-war generation of Germans, but education in America has contributed that this burden does not become a threat, but some kind of a motive in a political fight. So as her greatest achievement she considered the upbringing of "*civil disobedience in Germany*" (Bevan, 2001: 158).

A common feature of her political views and political engagement is that she was one of the creators of practical political ecologism in Germany. Ecologism can be seen as a new ideology that presents itself as a complete break from traditional political ideologies such as conservatism, socialism, liberalism and anarchism. (Nadić, 2007: 7) Because of that, ecologism finds its theoretical and ideological stronghold exactly in environmental political theory. It is necessary for ecologism so that it could create not only the break up with current ideologies, but also provide its own ideological construction. Ecologism, understood as an ideology presents a scientific and political critique of contemporary political, economic and social developments. In addition, ecologism provides solutions for a new way of organizing modern societies:

“...ecologism holds that a sustainable and fulfilling existence presupposes radical changes in our relationship with the non-human natural world, and in our mode of social and political life.” (Dobson, 2005: 3)

It is in this ecologism Kelly has found shelter for her basic political ideas: *feminism, environmental protection, the struggle for peace, social justice, the struggle against poverty and inequality, antinuclear policy*. She tied her political ideas to the Green Party. Greens have emerged on the political scene as a specific German phenomenon. In their early definitions, describing themselves as

“left oriented, radical ecologist party who is the main force in German peace movement”...“institutionalized expression of the new German social democratic movement”. (Mewes 1983: 51)

Created on heterogeneous political goals and with growing internal opposition which these objectives created, the Greens managed to present themselves to domestic and international public as a collection of united groups turned against the developed industrial society. In a word, the Greens were to be “rebels against the system”. (Nadić 2007: 14) and also to represent the true interests of the people. The meaning of the politicization of their ideas and their insertion into a political party, Kelly saw through the meaning of what she meant by the policy and the proper role of political parties:

"To my mind the purpose of politics and of political parties is to stand up for the weak, for those who have no lobby or other means of exerting influence....I view my political work as acting for and with people" (Kelly 2001: 125)

In this view of politics she tried to engage her feminist views. Her feminist views are very close to classical feminism and eco-feminism, but of course there is more expansion. She didn't connect feminism only with ecology and the environment, but also with issues of poverty, social poverty, nuclear disaster, peace and nonviolence, and so on.

"...when we try to rid the world of things as oppressive as nuclear, chemical, and conventional weapons, or poverty, sexism, and racism, it can help us to look at their structural underpinning. This is a system of patriarchy which is found in all systems, whether they are capitalist or state-socialist. Patriarchy is a system of male domination, prevalent in both capitalist and socialist countries, which is suppressive of women and restrictive to men. Patriarchy is a hierarchical system in which men have more value and more social and economic power. Under it women suffer both from oppressive structures and from individual men. It shows itself in all areas of our lives, affecting political and economic structures, our work, our home, and our personal relationships." (Kelly 2001: 24)

We believe that Petra Kelly's ecofeminism was not even a classic ecofeminism. For example, as pointed out by Haywood, the essence of ecofeminism would be emphasized in the following:

"The idea according to which nature is a resource that is supposed to be exploited or a force to be tamed is in greater contrast to women than to men, because they recognize that the nature is acting in them and through them, and intuitively feel that personal fulfillment comes from acting in accordance with nature, instead of acting against it. Therefore, the overthrow of patriarchy announces the establishment of a complete new relationship between human society and the natural world" (Heywood, 2005: 303)

What Kelly realized is that the essence of patriarchy is much broader, so that the struggle against patriarchy involves primarily the struggle against authority and hierarchy that prevails in society. This hierarchy is not only represented in the family, but also in political relations based on domination. In this sense, eco-feminism as a political ideology with Petra Kelly has a number of appearing forms. One is the *struggle for global peace and disarmament*, where she called for the rejection of war as a political instrument; radical disarmament; removal of foreign military bases; replacing military defense in civil defense welfare; the abolition of military alliances; elimination of production, testing, sales, and use of nuclear , biological and chemical weapons; the abolition of the global arms trade, and the transformation of industry and military budgets in favor of social and economic needs.

"...Peace has a wider meaning for us. It is not just the absence of mass destruction, but a positive internal and external condition in which people are free so that they can grow to their full potential... We believe in taking unilateral steps not only to dissolve military power blocs, but also to dissolve armies and to get rid of "deterrence" thinking.... And within that framework of peace we also believe in civilian-based defence social defence. Our idea of social defence presents an alternative to the dead-end self-destruction of the arms race. Social defence or defence by nonmilitary means against any military attack from outside or within is based on the idea that a society cannot be controlled if it is not prepared to cooperate with the oppressor. In this process of bringing more justice, peace, and harmony to the planet earth, we must also learn to become more peaceful, just, and tolerant with ourselves and with one another, within our own ranks..."(Kelly, 2001: 64-65)

Another goal of her eco-feminist ideology is the fight for *global economic justice*, she appeals to the rich industrialized countries to limit their consumption of global resources, to halt the export of dangerous technologies; and to stop using the superior economic power on subordinates and exploit less favorable or

unfriendly nations. To this end, she encourages economic decentralization "monolithic way" and the production technology represented by the "military-industrial complex".

"The vicious cycles are many: in fact, the poor are feeding the rich; in fact, the rich are living off the poor countries they exploit! Ironically, the conventional strategy of development agencies in many Third World governments--to encourage greater exports only makes matters worse. Increased exports from Third World countries only benefit the international agribusiness which dominates Third World agricultural production and maintains the large landholders there. But it will not feed hungry Africans. The question, "What can poor countries do to become self-sufficient?" requires a small but critical change to "What can rich countries do to become self sufficient?" (International Herald Tribune, July 19, 1985) There are so many myths about world hunger, myths which concern us directly. The unequal distribution of food can be described as world cannibalism! There is really no such thing as world hunger, but only the hunger of particular areas and particular social groups. The total food resources available in the world would be perfectly adequate to feed everyone properly if they were only fairly distributed." (Kelly 2001: 48-49)

The third objective is the *strugle for global human rights and demand for respect of universal standards* - not only condemning of violations of the enemy, without regard for those of allies; freedom of dissent for all; end of male domination and establishment of women's power; termination of suppression of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities; termination of invasions and occupations (for example, Tibet) and care for children, the elderly and the sick.

The fourth dimension of the eco-feminist ideology of Petra Kelly is the protection of the biosphere, or "*green society*". To protect the biosphere and its inhabitants, she calls an end to nuclear technology ("No more Chernobyl!"); ban on depositing toxic waste ("*garbage imperialism*"); end of the commercial destruction of rainforests; and the prohibition of all other practices and technologies that threaten to destroy the capacity of the planetary life support. Instead of all this, she calls for a creation of "soft" energy and other technologies, as well as for cleaning, restoration, recycling, and dignified preservation. She appeals for a "*global culture of environmental responsibility*" and establishment of "*binding principles governing the ecological relations among all countries*". For global solving of the problem of cooperation, she calls for a combination of demands from below and responsibility from above that will bring the benefit of all. She calls for solidarity and participation of people across national borders and through all of these problem areas. This way people can force governments to adopt policies that respond to global needs and insist on change.

"The Green society we strive for is based on ecological principles that can mediate humanity's relationship with nature. This means first and foremost searching for a soft and decentralized energy system; for soft, decentralized technologies; and for methods of true codetermination and self- determination moving away from monolithic modes of production and monolithic technology. This also has to do with poisoned food and world hunger. At the present time, the five hundred largest industrial corporations control nearly one trillion dollars in corporate assets in the United States. The six hundred largest multinational corporations will control over 40 percent of planetary production by the end of this decade. All of this has to do with poisoned food and world hunger." (Kelly 2001: 41-42)

A prerequisite for the Green Society, Kelly emphasized, is *accepting savings and post-materialist values, and on political grounds its the participatory, indirect democracy*. The ideology of "postmaterialist values", which itself included questions such as the ecology and environment, was based largely anti-economically, directly against the quantitative economic growth. It was to replace the ideology of consumption for consumption. Issues such as economic and industrial development, and physical security are no longer able to be the dominant issue in the ordinary or even in academic life. The causes should be sought in the fact that the sixties and seventies of last century in Western Europe were marked by strong industrial development. At the same time, strong industrial growth and high living standard was not followed

by humanization of industrial and social life, nor the standard of living and purchasing power were sufficient to satisfy personal factors. (Nadić 2005: 12)

"...Democratically and without violence we must change and transform society from its very foundation and throughout its entire structure and pattern of motivation. That means first of all changing ourselves, our behavior, and our consumer habits within Western economic growth societies. We can begin by reducing our consumption of goods in the West to such an extent that we do not provide a market for big business. We can reduce our consumption of goods to where we will use only our share of the world's resources and not take what belongs to someone else. This is just one small aspect of nonviolence in everyday life and the ultimate personal noncooperation with corrupt practices. I believe that those who have the faith to take these steps will find new dimensions to living. The actual danger as well as the potential solutions are not "out there." Both lie within us and taking responsibility for our personal behavior is just about the only thing in this world over which we have one hundred percent control..." (Kelly 2001: 32-33)

The issue of protection of the environment, saving resources and antinuclear policy is by Kelly the question of own political values and its own political identity, but also the destruction of nature is also the destruction of the essence of man.

"...Whenever we damage the environment, we must realize that we are damaging ourselves. Green politics is different from all other forms of politics because it acknowledges the complexity of that web of life. We need to rediscover our roots and our histories and to learn from those cultures which are more in harmony with their environment than we have ever been. Over many years we have set ourselves up to control, dominate, and exploit the planet..." (Kelly 2001: 74)

The immediate (direct) democracy is the political principle but also a way of organizing and implementing "green" policies. Kelly saw the essence of true democracy in that idea, where the changes come "from below" and in order to create prosperity for those who are just at the bottom of the existing hierarchical social ladder. The release from bureaucracy, governmental, military, political and business. The release from those forces that create hierarchy and use authority as a means of political and economic repression.

"...Greens politics is based on direct democracy—our effort is to redefine and reorganize power so that it flows from the bottom up. We seek to decentralize power and maximize the freedom and self-determination of individuals, communities, and societies. This means moving power out of the hands of centralized bureaucracies—above all, the military-industrial complex—and empowering people on the local level. It also means reaching across national borders and ideologies to build alliances with others also working for peace and ecology. It means moving government power away from the state towards smaller and smaller units of organization. In economics, grassroots democracy means a production system that maximizes workers' self-management and minimizes corporate or government control. It means units of production scaled to a comprehensible human dimension and that are locally responsive and globally responsible. The day may come when the Greens and a truly democratic and ecological partner among the established political parties, but until then, we must work in government as an anti-party party, an experiment in radical parliamentary opposition unwilling to compromise fundamental values for the sake of expediency..." (Kelly 1994: 42-43)

Meanwhile, Kelly has realized some features that may limit direct democracy.

"...Participatory democracy must not become a new formula for demagoguery, for misuse of grass-roots power, for tactics. It cannot mean hurting each other just because there is disagreement. There must always be room in Green politics for tolerance, for accepting each other's positions and points of view, just as there must always be room to act according to our own conscience in certain questions like the question of abortion. Living our values is what Green politics is all about..." (Kelly 2001: 66)

Finally, the fifth dimension of eco-feminist ideology of Petra Kelly is "anti-politics" and "anti-party". Anti-politics is the notion that no matter how attached to her is associated with the German Greens.

"...This is the power of nonviolent change and nonviolent transformation, a power that is common to all, to be used by all and for all. "Power over" is to be replaced by "shared power," by "the power to do things," by the discovery of our own strength as opposed to a passive receiving of power exercised by others, often in our name. It is not power to dominate--not power to terrorize or to oppress--but the power of nonviolent change. The Hungarian writer Gyorgy Konrad expressed it even better with his term "anti-politics," a moral force: "Anti-politics strives to put politics in its place and makes sure it stays there, never overstepping its proper office of defending and refining the morals of the game in a civil society. Anti-politics is the ethos of civil society, and civil society is the anti-thesis of military society..." (Kelly 2001: 58-59)

German Greens have defined themselves as an alternative to traditional parties, a new form of political organization based on the understanding of new concepts of life - ecology, nonviolence, democracy and gender equality. The whole party ideology in the first program of the Greens, the so-called "Bundesprogram", was based on a holistic approach - the protection of the environment is connected to social politics, social politics with the health and education policy, and all of that together with the economic policy, so that a rounded system of values, views and attitudes is created. Environmental policy, as a series of opinions of the Greens on the protection of life and environment, is radical and democratic - it has inspired anti-capitalism and anti-technocracy, but at the same time encouraged democracy through the participation of the majority of the population in political decision making. Precisely this was a decisive moment for the then position of the Greens. They become "ecologicistic" party that links the idea of environmental protections not only by fighting a by-product of modern capitalism, as is the consumer society and severe environmental degradation, but also through a struggle for ideas of direct democracy, the rights to demonstrations, civil disobedience and non-violent forms of resistance to state authority and state projects that may have negative consequences for the population, democracy and environment. (Nadić 2005: 85) Just as Petra Kelly thought and conceived it, German Greens were supposed to be "antiparty", something quite different from the traditional parties that were operating in Germany. The classic division between the "left" and "right" was not something that suited the Greens.

"We are an alternative to traditional parties. We have grown from a coalition of alternative parties and groups. We feel solidarity with all those who have become active in the new democratic movement: groups for the protection of life and nature, environmental groups, citizen initiative organisations, labor movements, Christian initiative organizations, peace movements, movements for women's rights, groups for the rights of the third world." (Die Grünen 1980: 4)

This alternative approach somehow maintained the avante-garde approach of the Greens, their uncompromising and dedicated political commitment, with a specific distance from the rest of the German political scene.

"we are neither left nor right, we are in front of them all. If that meant: to get to the real questions of the century and to define them without formerly ideological prejudice you have to transcend the traditional left-right orientation, it may be alright. But otherwise it was a nonsensical and rather preposterous definition" (Lippelt, internet)

In this context, *anti party* party is a term created by Petra Kelly, with which she meant

"...a party capable of choosing between morality and power, which uses creative civil disobedience to combat every form of repression, which combines audacious imagination with efficient working methods, and which recognizes the link between world peace and peace in every individual. And antiparty parties do not exercise power in the old

authoritarian sense; they try to transform power in order to enable people to achieve self-determination in their lives.." (Kelly 2001: 159)

On the other hand, the term anti-party party, as she imagined it meant not only an ideological distancing from traditional parties but also distancing themselves from classic parliamentary political goals. Greens should have been half movement and half party, and the question which fights were fought about in Greens, is working with the Social Democratic Party or not, a question which left Kelly in no doubt. Although she didn't directly reject cooperation with the SPD she still preferred cooperation with organizations such as Amnesty International and Greenpeace.

"...When the Social Democrats shut down all the nuclear power plants, quit the arms race and start building ambulances instead of tanks, then we can begin to talk... Parliament isn't the goal...but part of a strategy" for radical social change... The day the Greens start to send ministers to Bonn, then it's not the Greens that I wanted..." (Hockenos 2008: 159)

History of the German Greens is a part of political history of Petra Kelly. Disappointed by faction conflicts within the party and defeat of her idea within the party, she also saw the defeat of anti-institutional essence of ecofeminism and ecologism for which she stood. In her "*Open Letter to the German Green Party*", she said the following:

"The Greens, set up as a kind of anti-party party, have turned into a party obsessed with power, into a "dead boring German party," as Josef Beuys so aptly put it shortly before he died... This certainly has little to do with thriving grassroots democracy. You only have to look at the lists of speakers at party congresses and delegates' meetings to discover that little regeneration is occurring in the ranks of the Greens and that there are few signs of a feminist, imaginative, and caring party. Thus the Greens, originally intent on transforming power from below, have meanwhile become victims of power from above" (Kelly 2001: 126)

If she was still alive today, there is a question of how Petra Kelly would have reacted to the new problems of modern civilization. Would she justify military intervention in the name of "human rights" and "spreading democracy"? Would she support the military intervention of NATO and the participation of German military power in them? Probably not. Pacifism was a too strong concept in her political vocabulary. Once again I will point out her thought on peace and nonviolence, which corroborates my speculations.

"Nonviolence is stronger than violence... The means and the ends must be parallel. You cannot reach a peaceful end with violent means and you cannot reach a just end with unjust means." (Kelly 2001: 26)

Therefore, Petra Kelly would probably today be the leader of all those oppressed and marginalized, robbed and the unemployed, regardless of gender, religion, nation and race. The power of her understanding of ecofeminism and her practical non-violent anti-politics arises precisely from the fact that Kelly *talked more about hope, morality and justice than about genders, gradually realizing that ecofeminism was beginning to lose meaning in a world with intense changes occurring that politicians and sociologists will later define as "globalization"*. That's why her step out of ecofeminism in a new ideology (which she didn't define by herself) was normal. The question of dominance of one sex over the other is just a consequence of what she fought against which is hierarchy that is oppressive and genocidal to the woman and also the worker, to the poor and to those who have been victims of ecological holocaust what was

Chernobyl. Therefore, the question of justice became central and universal for her and feminism has moved to the periphery.

In political terms, Kelly was the victim of unscrupulous political ambitions of Joschka Fischer, and realizing that she's losing her battle within the Greens, she said the following:

"So it turned out that being a Green cofounder and member of parliament for eight years made me a lonely person. I refused to play the tactics game of being either a dogmatic leftist 'Fundí' or a pro-Social Democrat conservative Green 'Realó' or even a mediating 'Centraló'— because I felt that all of these boundaries must be transcended if we are to create a nonviolent, feminist, ecologically alternative society." (Bevan 2001: 184)

And as Ruth Bevan rightly said, if by any chance Kelly accepted the power that classic politics brings, she would have probably lost her own personal power to think freely and to more freely express her political opinions, in one word she would have become an apologist for those in power. Today, in 2011, if she was still alive, Kelly probably would not have camped in the actions of "Occupy Wall Street" in Europe and America, but she'd certainly give a speech from which we could learn something. Then perhaps her ideas which she woven into the beginnings of the German Greens would again get a meaning and actuality they deserve.

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