

THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ANTHOLOGY

# SISTERHOOD IS GLOBAL



COMPILED, EDITED, INTRODUCED, AND WITH A NEW PREFACE BY  
ROBIN MORGAN

# SISTERHOOD IS GLOBAL

---

The International  
Women's Movement Anthology

*Compiled, Edited, Introduced, and with a New Preface by*  
**Robin Morgan**



The Feminist Press at The City University of New York  
New York

Copyright © 1996, 1984 by Robin Morgan  
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or used, stored in any information retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission from The Edite Kroll Literary Agency, 12 Grayhurst Park, Portland, Maine 04102, USA, except in case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Published by The Feminist Press at The City University of New York  
311 East 94th Street, New York, New York 10128-5684

First Feminist Press edition, 1996

02 01 00 99 98 97 96 5 4 3 2 1

The *Sisterhood Is Global* Project wishes to express gratitude for the generosity of the following benefactors, without whose funding support this book would not have been possible:

An anonymous woman donor  
The Columbia Foundation  
The Ford Foundation  
Ms. Frances Close Hart  
Ms. Maria King  
Ms. Andrea Kirsch  
Ms. Holly Lachowicz  
The J. R. MacArthur Foundation  
Ms. Maya Miller  
The Pathfinder Fund  
The Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries,  
United Methodist Church  
The World Division, Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church  
The Wonder Woman Foundation

***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data***

Sisterhood is global: the international women's movement anthology /  
compiled, edited, introduced, and with a new preface by Robin Morgan.  
p. cm.

Reprint. Originally published: Garden City, N.Y. : Anchor/Doubleday, 1984.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Feminism. 2. Women's rights.

I. Morgan, Robin.

[HQ1154.S54 1996] 96-38456

305.42—dc20

ISBN 1-55861-160-6

CIP

Printed in the United States of America.

Also by Robin Morgan

POETRY

*Monster*

*Lady of the Beasts*

*Death Benefits*

*Depth Perception*

*Upstairs in the Garden: Selected and New Poems*

FICTION

*Dry Your Smile*

*The Mer Child*

NONFICTION

*The Word of A Woman*

*The Demon Lover*

*The Anatomy of Freedom*

*Going Too Far*

*Sisterhood Is Global (ed.)*

*Sisterhood Is Powerful (ed.)*

*The New Woman (ed.)*

**RESEARCH DIRECTOR**  
**Jane Ordway**

*Research and Copy  
for Statistical Prefaces*  
Anne-christine d'Adesky  
Toni Fitzpatrick  
Annette Fuentes  
Peggy Orenstein  
Erica Romaine

*Research Assistance*  
Pamela Abrams  
Suzanna Fogel  
Kenneth Pitchford  
Laura Silver  
Nancy Zirinsky

**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR**  
**Karen Berry**

*Computer Coordinator*  
Fran Rosen

*Production*  
Marcia Landsman

*Production Assistance*  
Sedef Guman  
Amy Pellman  
Blake Morgan Pitchford  
Viv Sutherland  
Mary Washburn  
Anna Zeni

---

*Translators*  
Magda Bogin  
Carol Carl-Sime  
Anne-christine d'Adesky  
Cola Franzen  
Annette Fuentes  
Elisa Sierra Gutiérrez  
Sherif Hetata  
Lisa Kollisch

Edite Kroll  
Agnes Liebhardt  
Grace Lyu  
Bobbie Ortiz  
Rebecca Park  
Akiko Tomii  
Gloria Feiman Waldman

---

*Interns:* Joyce Chang, Nomi Itzhaik, Sandra Littell, Agnes Moses, Mercedes Suárez, Wendy Wolff, Donna Santos Yamashiro.

*Extended Family:* Patricia Carbine, Christiane Deschamps, Michelle Djenderedjian, Joanne Edgar, Dexter Guerrieri, Judith Helzner, Sylvia Kramer, Edite Kroll, Suzanne Braun Levine, Susan McHenry, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, Isel Rivero, Gloria Steinem, *Ms. Magazine*, The Women's Action Alliance, and the International Women's Tribune Center.\*

*Mascots:* Ida, Grey Kitty IV, Loki.

\* Also see Acknowledgments

## PREFACE TO THE FEMINIST PRESS EDITION

*Sisterhood Is Global*, as concept, project, book(s), and even international institute, has come to have more than one life of its own. This edition is another welcome incarnation.

Conceived in 1969 (while I was compiling *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the [US] Women's Liberation Movement*), this international anthology grew during fifteen years of networking, fundraising, researching, commissioning, translating, and editing articles, until publication in simultaneous hardcover and paperback (Anchor Press/Doubleday and Anchor Books, 1984). Gratifyingly, the book was hailed as "an historic publishing event," "an instant classic," and "the definitive text on the international women's movement," and adopted widely as a course text in women's studies, international affairs, global economics, and several other disciplines. In 1985, the United Kingdom/Commonwealth edition was published by Penguin Books, London. After an heroic translation effort, *Mujeres del Mundo* was copublished by Vindicacion Feminista, Madrid, and Hacer Editorial, Barcelona (hardcover 1993, paperback 1994), thanks to the dedication of Lidia Falcón, the Spanish Contributor; that edition is being distributed throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

The original Anchor Press/Doubleday edition was expected to stay in print for perhaps five years, the normal life assigned by a commercial publisher to a reference work containing updatable statistical data. (By comparison, *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, containing few statistics, was published in 1970 by Random House/Vintage Books, and is still in print.) Given the limited life expectancy for *Sisterhood Is Global*, therefore, it's been a pleasant surprise that this "international feminist encyclopedia" as it came to be called, has remained in print, selling strongly at a commercial level for more than twelve years. In 1996, when the publishing rights reverted to me, Florence Howe—friend and founder/director of The Feminist Press—expressed concern that *Sisterhood Is Global* remain readily available, since it continues to be the preferred course text on the status of women worldwide. Consequently, The Feminist Press—itself a cherished institution of the global women's movement—places this edition in your hands. In all respects other than this preface, it is identical to the original edition.

The essays remain as moving as when their authors first wrote them. Some of the contributors, known only in their own countries when I solicited their writing, now are internationally recognized literary names—among them, Marjorie Agosin, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nawal El Saadawi, Fatima Mernissi. The statistical preface preceding each country's essay contains carefully researched, still relevant data on the status of women. In my Prefatory Note and Methodology, I noted that in many cases we had managed to locate and publish this data for the first time; I also appealed to scholars to work toward filling in the blanks—what our researchers came to call "NDOs" and "NSOs" ("no data obtainable" and "no statistics obtainable"). Considerable research has been done,<sup>1</sup> yet the surface is still barely scratched. Humanity remains tragically ignorant about the majority of itself that happens to be female.

There have been dramatic geopolitical changes since 1984. *Yet ironically the condition of women remains virtually the same.* In many regions and on many issues, it has worsened.

Female human beings still comprise two thirds of the world's illiterates (30 percent of all women cannot read or write); we are now 80 to 90 percent (an increase) of the world's 1.3 billion poor and, with our children, over 90 percent of all refugee and displaced populations—

<sup>1</sup> Issue-specific and country- or region-specific research done since 1984 is, happily, too extensive to list here. Among general resources worthy of recommendation are *The World's Women 1970–1990: Trends and Statistics*, and *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics*, as well as *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women 1945–1995* (UN Blue Books Series)—all UN publications available from the UN Department of Public Information; and *Women's Movements of the World* (Keesing's Reference Publications, Longman Group United Kingdom, 1988).

populations that more than doubled between 1981 and 1993. We are the majority of the elderly, another growing population (rising by 2.7 percent annually since 1990, according to WHO<sup>2</sup>). We still comprise the majority of the world labor force's unemployed and underemployed, still average 40 percent less pay than men at the same jobs, still have little if any access to credit or funding. Our unpaid labor—in the home, in childbirth, childrearing, subsistence gardening, farming, water hauling, wood gathering, etc.—if expressed in market terms of monetary worth, would yield a “staggering \$16 trillion, or about 70 percent more than the officially estimated \$23 trillion of current global output,” acknowledged UNDP's 1995 *Human Development Report*, in an understatement reflecting UN agencies' traditionally conservative estimates. Women still suffer disproportionately from state violence (custodial abuse, armed conflicts, etc.) and from domestic violence (rape, battery, incest, sexual abuse) so pervasive as to be regarded by many as “normal,” and only recently, finally, recognized as among the most significant causes of female disability and death worldwide. Global population, which has more than doubled in the past forty-five years, currently grows by close to 90 million a year. Yet women still lack the basic human rights of full reproductive freedom and sexual choice: as you read this, 300,000 women—many children themselves, most malnourished, anemic, and lacking medical care—are in labor. According to the 1996 UNICEF/WHO/Johns Hopkins University report, 585,000 women—the number has *risen* during the past decade—now die annually in pregnancy or childbirth, and another 18 million suffer disabling illnesses or injuries from complications. Women are the primary victims of STDs (sexually transmitted diseases) in general, and the planetary pandemic of HIV/AIDS has begun to take its worst toll in female victims, especially in Africa and increasingly in Asia, as well as in many cities of the industrialized global North. Approximately two million girls a year are clitoridectomized, joining the estimated 100 million women alive today who have undergone female genital mutilation—although decades of feminist efforts combatting these practices have begun to effect a consciousness change.

To comprehend how the major geopolitical shifts of the past twelve years have affected women, it's necessary to read between the lines, because female people are still not sufficiently visible in press coverage of big stories. For example, since 1984:

—The USSR dissolved, Eastern European countries underwent major upheavals, the Berlin Wall fell, Germany reunified. Those hardest hit by the instability have been women, the last hired, first fired, and longest-stuck in bread lines; their parliamentary numbers have dropped, and in certain countries (for example, Poland) the Roman Catholic Church's reemergent power in politics has eroded reproductive rights.

—South Africa achieved a relatively nonviolent transition from apartheid toward democratic government. It was largely women who pressed for nonviolence, demanded that gender equality and sexual-preference rights be enshrined in the new constitution, and even insisted that Nelson Mandela revise his “one man, one vote” call to “one person, one vote.”

—Elsewhere on the African continent, dictators, warlords, and tribal-enmity agitators unleashed havoc in Somalia and Liberia, and attempted genocide in Rwanda and Burundi. The majority of the massacred and the devastated survivors were/are women and children, so it's no surprise that Hutu *and* Tutsi women have together pled for peace on more than one occasion—but no world press took notice. Nor has coverage of Nigeria's dictatorship noted that government policy is not to punish the latest “fad”: Nigerian men flinging acid at the faces and genitalia of women who challenge their authority. Nor have major media reported that Sudan's 1991 penal code, instituted by the military government, institutionalized a “modesty law” for women, violations thereof punishable by forty lashes.

—In the former Yugoslavia, dictators, warlords, and tribal enmities (euphemized as “ethnic

<sup>2</sup> See Glossary for full names of UN agencies and affiliates.

conflicts” when the antagonists are white) also wreaked havoc and attempted genocide on civilians, for which read: women and children. Again, (ignored) women from all sides petitioned for peace. Serb, Croat, and Bosnian women all suffered displacement, and many Croat and Serb women were raped, but it is estimated that *up to 100,000 Bosnian Muslim women* were raped and forcibly impregnated by Serbs in a deliberate policy of “ethnic cleansing”; as many as 20,000 are estimated to have died in Serb brothel-camps. The 1996 UN International Criminal Tribunal in the Hague delivered landmark indictments treating rape/sexual assault as a war crime, a crime against humanity. This historic victory for feminists, who have insisted that international law recognize gender-related crimes, also challenges domestic law: if rape in war is a crime against humanity, then what is it in peacetime?

—The catastrophic meltdown and explosion in 1986 at the Chernobyl nuclear plant in Ukraine (then still part of the USSR), the disastrous Alaskan oil spill from the tanker *Exxon Valdez* in 1989, increasingly alarming reports over the past decade about perforations in the ozone layer, and a host of perhaps less dramatic but equally grave violations of the environment have finally helped awaken the general public to crucial ecological concerns. Women have always been at the forefront of environmentalist movements. Indeed, women still suffer first, worst, and twofold from all forms of pollution, toxic waste, and nuclear fallout: economically (as agricultural workers, etc.), and in health terms (for example, the breast-cancer epidemic).

—When the 1986 “People’s Revolution” overthrew the Marcos dictatorship, the Philippines’ intensely activist women’s movement played a large (underreported) part. Three years later, the Tiananmen Square uprising—during which students chose a twenty-three-year-old woman student, Chai Ling, as their commander-in-chief—ended tragically. Yet headlines rarely trumpet demographic changes potentially more revolutionary than uprisings: over 60 percent of China’s population is now under age twenty-five and, despite the resurgence of female infanticide, half female. In the growing divorce rate (it topped one million nationally in 1995, and has doubled in Beijing since 1991), 70 percent of the cases are women-initiated; in 25 percent of all the cases family violence is cited as the cause. Rape-crisis hotlines have begun, and the first shelter for battered women (private, not government-founded) recently opened its doors, in Shanghai.

—In South Asia, individual women (in Pakistan, Burma/Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh) gained access to power via their elite political families, but performed as leaders in their own right. Less noticed yet of greater ultimate impact are the organizations of formerly enslaved “comfort women,” initiated in South Korea, now spreading across Asia; the birth of an autonomous women’s movement in Vietnam; the ongoing mobilization by Thai, Japanese, Filipina, and other Asian women against sex tourism and the sexual traffick in women and children; the courageous lesbian feminist groups emerging in the Philippines and Indonesia; or the legislative initiatives of feminist nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and women parliamentarians for women’s property rights in Nepal.

—Iraq invaded Kuwait, over the (unreported) protests of Iraqi women still recovering from the eight-year war with Iran. Again, war brought mass rapes, targeting especially South Asian women who had been employed—and frequently abused—by Kuwaitis as domestic servants. When the US mounted “surgical strikes” against Iraq, “smart bomb” mistakes wounded and killed civilians, mostly women and children, those also hardest hit by the economic boycott. (Interestingly, governments always manage to feed their armies.) Amnesty International notes that women’s fatality rate in war—5 percent of all victims in World War I, rising to 50 percent in World War II—soared to *nearly 80 percent* in the 1990s. Less than one-tenth of war coverage on the Middle East/Gulf region focuses on female human beings—not even as victims, much less agents of social change: the Iranian women organizing underground, for instance, or the women who drove cars in defiance of the law in Saudi Arabia, or women still campaigning for suffrage in “liberated” Kuwait.



—In the Caribbean and Central and South America, these years witnessed the end of several civil wars (El Salvador, Nicaragua), and the fall of some infamous juntas (Argentina, Chile, Haiti). But how to estimate the influence on these outcomes of, for example, the Mothers of the Disappeared, who inspired women worldwide to similar action (as did the Israeli Women in Black), or the crucial role women played in various liberation movements, or the effect of the now highly networked regional women's movement?

—The international economic crisis, combined with certain World Bank and International Monetary Fund requirements for overhauling economic policies in developing countries—"structural adjustment," for instance—have the most negative impact on women. The 1996 UNDP *Human Development Report* describes a "two-class world," a global widening gap between the rich and the poor, with eighty-nine developing countries *worse* off than a decade ago—and poverty wears a women's face. In industrialized countries, too, Draconian cutbacks of social welfare programs have intensified the feminization of poverty.

—Peace negotiations in both the Middle East and Northern Ireland have been praised and closely watched; women—key to both processes—have introduced a markedly different style. Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi drew world attention as a brilliantly articulate Palestinian spokeswoman (though her equally insightful remarks about sexism received coverage only in feminist media), yet rejected a post in the new Palestinian Authority, preferring independent advocacy on behalf of women, secularism, free speech. Similarly, Ireland's President, Mary Robinson, recognized as a considerable influence in the Northern Ireland–England peace process, openly allies herself with women, the lesbian and gay movement, the young, the disabled, the elderly. Both women have emerged from strong bases. Palestinian feminist organizations have for years been building the infrastructure of a future state, by the mid 1980's already drafting legislation to guarantee women's rights under secular law. The Irish feminist movement has seen at least twenty-five years of work bear fruit this past decade: contraceptives are now legal, nor is it anymore criminal to travel abroad for an abortion; same-sex love is now decriminalized; and in 1995 legal divorce finally passed a national referendum. Such organizing is contagious: in Northern Ireland, The Women's Coalition ran for and won a place at the 1996 peace negotiations. The Coalition, including Protestant and Catholic women, describes itself as bringing a "nonpartisan, nonsectarian, energetic voice to the table . . . traditionally dominated by men," and vows to stop any temperamental walkouts by negotiating parties.

The real work always takes place locally, but "trickle up" phenomena have begun to affect international forums. After the 1975–85 UN Decade for Women (the Mexico City, Copenhagen, and Nairobi Women's Conferences), feminists began mobilizing for UN *general* conferences: Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), and Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995). At each—and at the 1996 Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul—a daily Women's Caucus was organized for NGOs by former US Congresswoman and activist Bella Abzug and the Women's Environment and Development Organization, the NGO she founded; the Women's Caucus has had a cumulative, considerable, and beneficial effect on many policies of governments and of the UN itself. Women's groups also honed strategies, applied for UN-accredited NGO status, attended regional meetings (where agendas are decided and documents drafted) before each conference, and pressured for inclusion of NGO representatives *on* government delegations. One result: the Platform for Action passed by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995), is the strongest official statement on women internationally to date. Governments have begun to glimpse that *all* issues are "women's" issues.

The UN itself is a notorious old boys' network, despite the Beijing Conference's warning that "without the active participation of women . . . at all levels of decision-making,

the goals of equality, development, and peace cannot be achieved.” At this writing, the upcoming “election” for Secretary General—a game played by insiders with stacked decks—presents an opportunity to which feminists are rising: we may soon celebrate the first Madam Secretary General.

One of the international NGOs working toward that day is The Sisterhood Is Global Institute. This activist legacy of the book was founded in 1984 by the Contributors, as the first international feminist think-tank and the first NGO to organize actions regarding female human rights. The independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt Institute, currently based in the US, boasts a resource library, publishes a newsletter, has “mothered” its first branch (in Beirut), and has organized public events, scholarly conferences, investigative commissions, and activist drives in thirteen countries. Its Urgent Action Alert System mounts international campaigns of support for women prosecuted or persecuted for activities on behalf of women. Other projects focus on female human rights literacy, women prisoners, making visible women’s unpaid productive and reproductive labor, and developing strategies to combat fundamentalism in all religions.<sup>3</sup>

The Institute, of which I am proudly a founder, is one of the many ways *Sisterhood Is Global* has affected my life. Since 1984, I’ve gone twice into the Palestinian refugee camps in West Bank and Gaza, Jordan, and Egypt to report on the conditions of women. I’ve had the privilege of being an invited organizer, consultant, or lecturer in Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, England, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, and the Philippines. I’ve had the chance to learn from remarkable women, and the honor of being useful, like helping to midwife into existence the first Feminist Dalit<sup>4</sup> Organization in the world, in Katmandu. My desk currently bears invitations for next year that include engagements in the Caribbean, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Mongolia, Morocco, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Syria, and Taiwan. My writing has been profoundly influenced by *Sisterhood Is Global*. *The Demon Lover* (Norton, 1989), which began as a study of US terrorism, grew into an analysis of patriarchal violence worldwide; *The Word of A Woman* (Norton, 1992), a collection of my essays, reflects the same geographical range; even my fiction and poetry have been transformed by this consciousness. And in 1989, when I became editor-in-chief of the then-defunct *Ms.* magazine and relaunched it as a bimonthly free of advertising, I initiated an international news section, plus fiction, poetry, feminist theory, and journalism from around the world. By the time I left in 1993, that version of *Ms.* was more successful than any before or since; ironically but hearteningly, the international tone was even a commercial hit.

There’s much that I would do differently were I first assembling *Sisterhood Is Global* today. I’d take advantage of a still-insufficient but improved consciousness about the realities and rights of the disabled, of young girls, of old women. I’d add more countries, and invite as additional Contributors various extraordinary women I’ve come to know—although no one could ever replace the great Simone de Beauvoir, who died in 1986.

Two changes I *can* make, fortunately, in this edition. The anonymous woman donor (listed so at her insistence) among the anthology’s funders was Genevieve Vaughan. Gen, a feminist theorist and activist, is now “out of the closet” as a benefactor; via her Foundation for A Compassionate Society, she has supported feminist projects around the world. Also, it can now

<sup>3</sup> For information on tax-deductible support for The Sisterhood Is Global Institute and/or on joining The Sisterhood Is Global Network, please contact: Ms. Mahnaz Afkhami, Executive Director, The Sisterhood Is Global Institute, 4343 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 201, Bethesda, Maryland 20814, USA; Tel: 1 (301) 657-2017 and 1 (301) 657-4355; Fax: 1 (301) 657-4381; e-mail: SIGI@igc.apc.org.

<sup>4</sup> *Dalit*, which means “oppressed,” is now the preferred, politicized self-description of lower-caste peoples once termed “Untouchables,” and later called (by Gandhi) *Harijan*, or “Children of God.”

be noted that Isel Rivero—friend, sister poet, and political colleague, who is thanked in the Acknowledgments for her “multifaceted contribution” to the book—is also La Silenciada (“The Silenced One”), the Cuban Contributor. The pseudonym’s necessity was explained in her biographical note, but I’m glad that now, with her permission, I can acknowledge her fine writing.

I remain brazenly proud of this book, of what we accomplished, of our being so ahead of the times that it’s taken twelve years for them to (almost) catch up with us. In 1984, such terms as “battered women,” “sexual harassment,” “female human rights,” even “feminism” itself, were still considered suspect coinages of radical feminists; today they have attained respectability, appearing in UN resolutions, policy documents, academic treatises. I’m proud that, well before indigenous peoples’ activism forced a new consciousness in international circles, *Sisterhood Is Global* had invited Cherokee feminist Rayna Green to be the US Contributor, and had a policy of encouraging coauthorship—by an indigenous feminist and one of European descent—on essays from countries with large indigenous populations (e.g., Australia and New Zealand). I’m proud that we never considered including Israel without also including Palestine, and insisted that sexual preference/orientation be a category in the preface to each essay, even over the objections of more than one Contributor. And I’m proud of all the women (and some men of conscience) who have read, used, and cited *Sisterhood Is Global*, adopting it for purposes ranging from education to entertainment to inspiration, from researching their immigrant ancestors’ countries to packing it as “the feminist Fodor’s” travel guide. *Thank you.*

Particular acknowledgements are in order regarding this edition. I’m grateful to Martha K. Levin, Vice President and Publisher of Anchor Books, for granting my personal request that Anchor relinquish the printing film to The Feminist Press without charge. Jana Meredyth Talton’s wit and friendship have been as valuable as her efficient administrative support. Deborah Ann Light’s generosity, enabling staff support for my work on this and other independent international projects, has been a pragmatic blessing. As usual, my longtime literary agent Edite Kroll helped this volume into existence, as did my old friend Karen Berry. Florence Howe’s determination that The Feminist Press publish this edition elicits my thankful pleasure in knowing *Sisterhood Is Global* is in such good hands and distinguished authorial company; my thanks go, as well, to Senior Editor Jean Casella, Editor Sara Cahill, and Associate Director Sue Cozzi. Last, most, and always, generic gratitude to my friend, artistic colleague, survival tutor, and neighbor, Blake Morgan.

A word about the future. We are currently investigating the possibility of what would be a rather massive undertaking: the total revision, updating, and expansion of *Sisterhood Is Global*, aimed toward the new millennium, and available online through the Internet. In effect, this means the creation of a global cyberspace databank on women, one continually updatable in ways not possible with print. It’s too early, however, to make any promises that we will be able to raise the funding and mount the organization to accomplish such an staggering task or maintain it at the high standards I envision.

Then again, my motto while working on *Sisterhood Is Global* was “Only she who attempts the absurd can achieve the impossible.”

I’m older now, a little wearier, and a lot wiser.

But I still believe it.

Robin Morgan  
New York City  
October 1996

## PREFATORY NOTE AND METHODOLOGY

*Sisterhood Is Global* has been more than twelve years in conception and development and five years in its actual accomplishment. I first considered compiling and editing an international feminist anthology in 1968, shortly before the publication of *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, the first anthology of writings from the US women's movement. In fact, an internationalist perspective began to surface during my compilation of that earlier anthology, which includes articles by women of many different cultures within the United States. But much intervened in the following decade, including the great rush of US feminist activism, plus six books of my own. Most important, in 1968 a consolidated feminist network on the cross-national front did not yet exist. That was to require years of hard work, patience, travel, meetings, and changed sensibilities on the part of all of us. It was not until the late 1970's that my old dream of this book began to take shape again. Even then, and despite an awareness that the task would be far more challenging than *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, neither I nor the women who later joined me in the project had any idea of just how large, complex, and difficult an endeavor we had undertaken. Perhaps that was just as well; our naïveté served us where our courage might have failed.

The book's methodology evolved with the project. For example, the originally planned one-page "background" introductions to each country's article kept expanding. As both our knowledge and our curiosity deepened, our standards rose, and the information categories became more sophisticated. The data that came in were simply too vital and fascinating to exclude, especially since much hitherto had been unavailable and/or unpublished. Thus, the Statistical Prefaces came into being. They then necessitated a larger research staff, still more international phone calls and cables, increased office space, and, eventually, the use of word processors and computers—all of which in turn required additional fundraising. Every aspect of *Sisterhood Is Global* developed in this fashion, took more time than planned, and cost more effort than estimated—but was more rewarding than ever imagined.

### The Countries

Seventy countries, plus the United Nations itself, are covered in this book. While by no means a complete list of all the world's nations, it is nonetheless, to our pride, a representative one. Every region, type of government system, and stage of "development" is here. The majority are Third World countries (as are the majority of the countries on the planet). Yet despite the wide range of nations represented, I wish that space and time limitations had permitted us to be even more inclusive.

For instance: to my regret, the women's movement in the Philippines (which has been so dynamic in opposing the sex-tourism industry) is not a presence; nor is Iceland, which has a woman president (Vigdís Finnbogadóttir) and which held a day-long women's strike in 1976 to demonstrate women's importance to the economy. Although we are proud to include a distinguished and large representation from North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, Jordan, sadly, is absent.<sup>1</sup> China is present, but Taiwan, unfortunately, is not; we tried but failed to gain access to feminist activists, including Lu Hsiu-Lien, the leading Taiwanese feminist writer currently serving a twelve-year prison sentence for "seditious feminist activism."

<sup>1</sup> Jordanian women won suffrage in 1974; by 1980, a woman was appointed Minister of Social Affairs; since 1965, the amount of research on women in Jordan exceeds that in any other field.

Our best efforts were also unsuccessful in obtaining articles from Angola, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bolivia, Cameroon, Chad, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Guinea, Iraq, Mozambique, Paraguay, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, Turkey, Uruguay, the Yemens, Zaire, and Zanzibar. Sometimes the women's movement in a country was so informally structured that the most thorough networking seemed unable to locate national spokeswomen; in certain other countries, despite the existence of an established movement, a woman could not write publicly about that movement in an international forum because of censorship strictures; in still other cases, where a totalitarian government or the rise of religious fundamentalism had placed the women's movement in a totally suppressed or highly endangered state, no feminist activist could risk open communication—although many of the Contributors in this volume did manage to do so in such circumstances. Last, there were women who were forced for a variety of reasons to withdraw after already having agreed to write articles. During a five-year period, the personal and political fates of more than a hundred women all over the world change drastically: revolutions take place, people are elected to high office or forced to go underground or into exile, people feel less (or more) free to write what they believe. The country representation in *Sisterhood Is Global* was assembled, therefore, in a process kept necessarily fluid, since in many cases the life conditions—or the lives themselves—of Contributors were at stake.

There are cases of “doubling” in this book—for example, where a country has been partitioned. Both the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) are separately represented. We had wished to offer the same presentation of both Koreas, but despite repeated efforts to obtain a contribution from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), no response came back. (For those entries which have more than one article on a single country, or more than one Contributor, see the section on the Contributors below.) The United Nations seemed an important inclusion, for reasons delineated in the Editor's Note preceding that article, but mostly because as the largest world body, it often functions as a model internationally—yet it also discriminates against women. It had been our intention from the first to include Palestine as well as Israel, and we are especially heartened by the strong *feminist* voices from both, printed here.

The Contributor articles, as well as the Statistical Prefaces preceding them, vary somewhat in length. In the case of the articles, this was usually because of the Contributor's choice of approach and the breadth of issues she was engaging; in the case of the Prefaces, it was usually owing to the differing presence or absence of obtainable current data on a particular country, and/or the length of its recorded history (e.g., China, Egypt). Generally, both the Contributions from and the Prefaces on Third World countries are longer than others. *Sisterhood Is Global* is merely an opening statement to what I hope will be many such international feminist anthologies, to further the dialogue between and solidarity of women everywhere. This book is not intended to be a definitive collection of all countries (or of all the women in any given country), but is meant to be a broadly representative, energetic, and varied assemblage of facts and articles by women whose main connection to one another is a mutual commitment to worldwide freedom for female human beings.

### The Contributors

The women whose articles appear in *Sisterhood Is Global* are a deliberately eclectic mix: grass-roots organizers, members of parliaments, novelists, scientists, journalists, guerrillas, scholars, poets, former heads of states, women in exile or underground, public feminist spokespersons and “closet feminists” in international diplomatic circles, activists

and theorists, women never before heard from and women already known worldwide. The political spectrum embraces radical feminist, moderate/reform feminist, and socialist feminist, to show as wide as possible a world view of women's activism, and in order to see just where the differences, similarities, parallels, and overlaps really are. Each Contributor is a native of the country about which she writes; the sole exception is US-born Margaret Chant Papandreou, who has given most of her life to Greece, is a Greek citizen, and has earned the acceptance that the Greek people show her. Personally, the Contributors reflect (and reflect on) virtually every aspect of life. In their articles, they address themselves to peace, war, and development issues, agriculture and economics, sexuality and sexual preference, motherhood, nationalism, tribalism, battery, rape, contraception, religion, democracy, art, suppression, organizing techniques, youth and age, education, marriage customs, tactics, revolution, culture, spirituality—and more. A few wrote, of necessity, under pseudonyms. In several cases, authorship is collaborative, and usually so as a special sign of feminist solidarity (the Maori and European-descent co-authors of the New Zealand piece, for instance). There are a few countries represented by two-part contributions, again for specific reasons: South Africa's devastating apartheid system is movingly presented by an African feminist activist now in exile, and also by several necessarily anonymous white feminist activists still living and organizing inside the country. The reasons for other such doublings are similarly self-evident. For each Contributor, and for differing reasons, writing her article was an act of political and personal courage.

The Contributors were invited to participate in this book, and all except four of the articles (which are expanded versions of material printed earlier) were specifically assigned and appear here for the first time. The choice of whom to invite was extremely difficult. But by 1980, after years of networking in the international feminist movement, I was privileged to know many individual feminists from other countries, and the respectful trust inherent in such personal contact was a great help in gaining advice on the delicate choice of whom to invite from a particular country; further networking within that country usually confirmed the choice. In some cases (notably in the Arab world and in Latin America) women's-rights activists who already were my friends graciously suggested the names of sister activists in neighboring countries—a sort of national networking extended to the regional level—a “ripple effect.”

To facilitate the onerous task of trying to depict the status of one's countrywomen in a limited space, each of the Contributors was given suggested guidelines for her own contribution, although she was urged to accept or ignore these guidelines at her own will, and many did indeed diverge from them. The guidelines included addressing such questions as: What is the basic situation of women in your country, the worst obstacle/adversary women face, the greatest strength they possess? What are the cutting-edge issues (which could range from suffrage to ending genital mutilation, from basic development issues to electing a woman prime minister)? What seem the most workable ways of uniting women in your country? Is there an organized women's movement there and, if so, what is its composition? How can other women in other countries most effectively and sensitively support their sisters in your country? Each Contributor was asked to focus her article as much as possible on present, political, and personal realities, and each was free to choose a format of her own devising. To our delight but not surprise, the Contributors embraced their responsibility with splendid creativity, managing each in her own unique fashion to depict the situation of her countrywomen with depth, inclusiveness, and fairness to the different factions of her nation's women's movement, while still maintaining the integrity of her own beliefs.

Consequently, the rich diversity in style and tone ranges from scholarly exegesis to



poetry, from first-person experience to theoretical analysis, from epistolary format to journalistic reporting. Our emphasis is on *the individual voice of a woman speaking not as an official representative of her country but rather as a truth teller*, with an emphasis on *reality as opposed to rhetoric*. Thus, all but two of the articles are by women writing autonomously; despite our attempt to obtain such voices from all participating countries, the exceptions are El Salvador and Vietnam, appearing here, respectively, with articles by the official women's association of the insurgent government and by the president of the official women's federation of the incumbent government.

Each Contributor also provided a brief biography on herself and a short list of Suggested Further Reading on women in her country (both of which appear at the end of each article). Whenever possible, the Statistical Preface for her country was sent to each Contributor for her approval; in many cases, the Contributors' own research was invaluable for data in the Prefaces (see the section on Preface methodology below).

As the articles began arriving (on staggered deadlines), those requiring translation were routed to translators specially selected not only for their linguistic capabilities but also for their political sensitivity. The pieces then returned to me for editing, after which they were sent back to their authors for final approval. The translation and editing processes both were aimed at preserving the politics, flavor, imagery, and tone of each writer, while making sure that the article was easily approachable in lucid, lively, accessible prose. The cooperation with which virtually all of the Contributors responded compensated for postal delays, language barriers, and the sheer bulk of material with which we were dealing.

### The Statistical Prefaces

These introductory sections to each Contributor's article are intended to perform two vital functions:

- 1) to free the Contributor from having to explain basic facts and background about her country, so that she can proceed directly to discussing the current status of women, central issues, indigenous needs and tactics, and strategies for change, and

- 2) to be of use to scholars in women's studies, international affairs, development and population issues, etc., as well as to governmental and nongovernmental women's groups, international agencies, and the general reader; to provide a wealth of data, carefully researched and sourced, some of which hitherto has been unavailable, and all of which has never before been assembled in one volume for easy reference.

Our ambitious intention quickly encountered its major obstacle: expectably but infuriatingly, most of the countries in the world have compiled very little data on their female citizens. Expectable because virtually all countries exist under patriarchal systems—not only of government but also of scholarly research—a sexism so pervasive as to become all but invisible. Women disappear. Or we do appear (statistically) as units of production or reproduction, as workers or mothers, even as daughters, sisters, and wives—but data on the “sexual politics” of our lives (battery, rape, sexual preference, incidence of sexual harassment or of incest, etc.) is scarce or nonexistent, and basic research on “what women want” has been scrupulously avoided. The United Nations itself, with characteristic understatement, recommended that each nation convene “a national conference of users and producers of the information in question . . . with a view to making recom-

mendations concerning the desirable and possible expansion of the data base on women."<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, international and national funding is not easily accessible to women social scientists—who are the obvious scholars to conduct such research, not only because they are freer of androcentric bias but also because they are likely to elicit more trust and therefore more honest responses from the female respondents of their studies. Meanwhile, too, even those nations with good intentions continue to approach “the woman question” with strategies based on questionable data gained through questionable methodology, and in many cases information that is more than a decade old (even in this epoch where change is taking place with greater rapidity than ever before).

The heartening news in all this, however, is that women scholars (and some male scholars of conscience) have persisted nonetheless in their research on the more than half the human species which is female. They are doing so more and more in independent research, and sometimes with the beginning of academic or governmental support for their invaluable contribution. Many of the Contributors to *Sisterhood Is Global* are among these scholars, and much of the material in the Statistical Prefaces is culled from studies completed only recently, or from data previously suppressed, or from sources once thought unapproachable, or from original research by the Contributors or their colleagues, or by our own research staff. Nevertheless, a new frustration settled in toward the end of the book's production: although we updated legislative and statistical data (even through galley proofs), there are cases where women's status—either progress or setback—has already altered.

Each Statistical Preface was put through a crucible of care. The research had to be conducted with as much sensitivity and as little Western ethnocentrism as possible—and had to be checked, re-checked, and edited with the same consciousness. (Indeed, we all learned much about the absence of such consciousness in a great deal of the already existing data we consulted.)

After a country had been assigned to a particular researcher, she immersed herself in various sources—the *Sisterhood Is Global* international library I had been assembling for some years, the libraries of the Women's Action Alliance, the International Women's Tribune Center, and the United Nations, public and specialty libraries, the Columbia University International Law Library (for civil and penal codes, legislation, etc.), and other published sources. She then visited or wrote UN Specialized Agencies, the country's UN mission as well as its consulate, contacted its embassy in Washington, and combed through the “country files” I had been compiling since the late 1960's—files of newspaper clippings, correspondence with women in that country, feminist media reports from the area. Again, feminist networking was invaluable here (see Acknowledgments): one could call a member of the Asian-Pacific Women's Caucus in the US, for example, for a contact who would in turn know of reliable resource people on China. On more than one occasion, we were able to find a scholar who had only recently finished the first study on a specific issue in a particular country, and who would generously make her not-yet-published findings available to us.

When the researcher had assembled as much information as she could, she drafted the Statistical Preface. It then proceeded through the staff in five routed stages of fact-checking, source evaluation, rewrites, copy editing and styling, and my final rewriting/editing. Whenever possible, it was then sent to that country's Contributor for her cri-

<sup>2</sup> “Supplement I: Activities Designed to Improve the Data Base for Planning for Women's Participation in Development.” Summary of Recommendations for Action, UNDP (G3100-1), 500-01, United Nations, Sept. 14, 1981.



tique. Even at that stage, a Preface might have information gaps; in most cases, this was because studies had not yet been done and the data simply did not exist, but sometimes it was because the information was available only in the subject country itself. Again and again, the Contributors solved the latter problem for us—going to statistical bureaus and libraries in their own countries, or to their own individual research notes, and answering what questions could be answered. In addition, they educated us further as to subtleties of possible misunderstanding that had so far escaped our editing. At every stage, updates were inserted and points clarified.

### Preface Structure

All sources for data in the Statistical Prefaces, both general sources and those for specific countries, appear in the comprehensive Bibliography at the back of this book.

Each Statistical Preface begins with a brief geographical placement and area description of the country, population (and percentage female),<sup>3</sup> capital city, and, in the rare cases where the head of state is a woman, that fact as well.

The next section, "Demography," cites Languages, Races or Ethnic Groups, Religions, Education (broken down into primary, middle, and higher education, and with female-male differentiation), Literacy<sup>4</sup> (with female-male comparison rates where obtainable), and the rates of Birth, Death,<sup>5</sup> Infant Mortality,<sup>6</sup> and Life Expectancy<sup>7</sup> (with female-male comparison rates where obtainable). We have not always included the maternal death rate, due to space restrictions and the frequent unavailability of recent, or any, data; when such a rate is included, however, it appears further on in the Family section.

The Preface then proceeds to a "Government" paragraph, summarizing the political system of the country, and giving information on Voting (if special circumstances prevail), Women's Suffrage, Equal Rights legislation, and Women in Government.

<sup>3</sup> Population figures and percentage female are commonly taken from the latest available censuses, or from other sources which themselves must offer estimates based on incomplete data or rough estimates, particularly in the so-called developing countries.

<sup>4</sup> All adult figures dated 1977 are drawn from the *World's Women Data Sheet* of the Population Reference Bureau, Inc., which bases its information on the UNESCO *Statistical Yearbook, 1977*. (Literacy figures otherwise dated are from usually more recent sources specific to that country; "female" and "male" are used in these cases when sources do not specify age.) *World's Women Data Sheet* noted that "country definitions of 'adult' and 'literacy' vary. These data are generally based on the most recent census or survey from which an estimate can be derived." In our Prefaces, when we use the terminology "women" and "men" we are referring to adult populations only (although, again, the definition of "adult" varies from country to country).

<sup>5</sup> Birth and death rate figures in this book usually are sourced from the *1980 World Population Data Sheet*, whose dates are "1977 or 1978" for "developed" countries and 1975–80 for "less developed" or "developing" countries; in the latter case, the source notes that the statistics are frequently rough estimates because of less complete registration of births and deaths.

<sup>6</sup> Our infant mortality data refer to the number of deaths of infants under one year of age and bear the dates 1977 for developed countries and 1975–80 for less developed countries; they are based on the *World's Women Data Sheet*, which notes, "For most less developed countries, rates were derived by applying an estimated 1975–80 sex differential to the most recently available estimate of the combined infant mortality rate as shown on the *1980 World Population Data Sheet* of the Population Reference Bureau." This sheet, in turn, notes, "For many less developed countries with incomplete registration, [these] rates are the latest available estimates."

<sup>7</sup> If dated 1975–80, life expectancy data refer to life expectancy at birth, and are drawn from the *World's Women Data Sheet*, which notes that such estimates of life expectancy should be regarded only as rough approximations when pertaining to less developed countries.