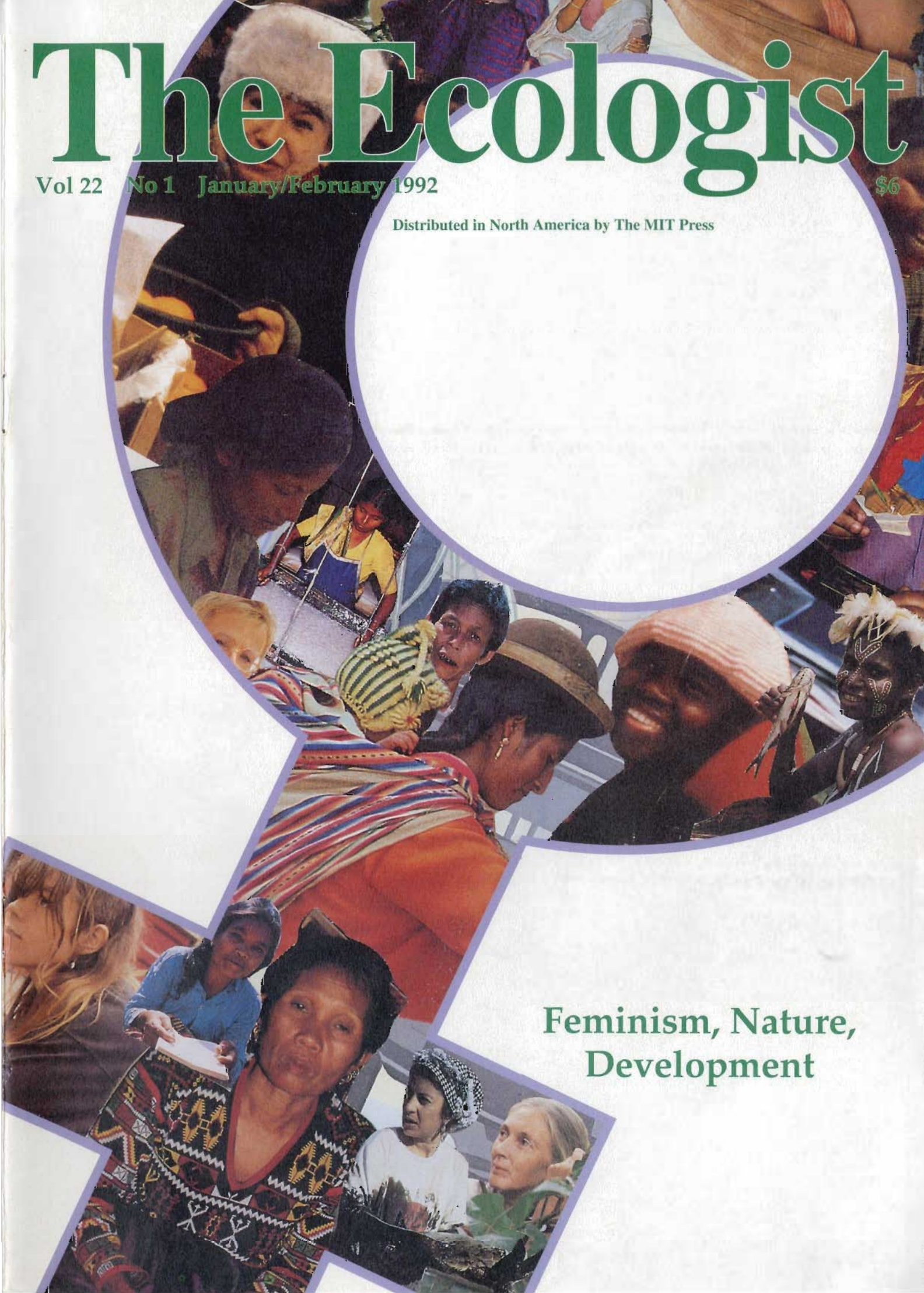


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Feminism, Nature,
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The Ecologist

Vol. 22, No. 1, January/February 1992

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Cover design by Sarah Mason. *The Ecologist* is printed on recycled paper whitened with hydrogen peroxide.

The Challenge of Feminism

A shadow lies over the environmental movement: patriarchy. Like so many movements before it — socialist, conservationist, civil rights, national liberation — the environmental movement is failing to acknowledge and criticize its own attachment to male power and privilege. Whether it is an oversight or deliberate, this failure to recognize patriarchy threatens to undermine the whole movement.

The problem is not just that the public figures in the environmental movement are predominantly men while surveys show that most activists are women. Nor is it just that men and their views and styles of work still dominate meetings and campaigns. Nor is it merely that the perspectives of leading figures in the movement, from Pinchot and Muir to Commoner, Goldsmith, Naess and Bookchin are still widely assumed to apply to men and women equally.

The problem is deeper. By shying away from the challenge of feminism, men (and many women) in the movement are blocking out opportunities and perspectives that will be indispensable for reaching the solutions they are anxious to find. Environmentalists cannot credibly discuss the effects and future of development, equality and justice, conflict-resolution, the preservation of diverse cultures, the industrial and military complex, the reconstruction or preservation of economic self-sufficiency or the dynamics of people's movements without discussing feminism. Any discussion about the masculine and feminine "principles" and relations between humans and nature must take into account how human nature, in all of its diverse forms, has been partly defined by the existence of patriarchy (see Val Plumwood, *this issue*). The distortion and cooption of women's demands for fairness and justice in the hands of the major development institutions (see Pam Simmons, *this issue*) is a warning to all environmentalists who wish to lobby and negotiate through these channels.

If the movement does not face up to its own patriarchal base, it is excluding potential allies, while creating a hierarchy ripe for a sell-out. The loyalties of the men who make it to the "top" are inevitably towards other men of their ilk, not to the people who are relying on them to represent their interests. What this results in are deals and compromises which have no popular support and no grounding in reality. Deals like "debt-for-nature" swaps will be pursued in closed boardrooms at the cost of local people's rights and lives. Criticism will be blunted by consideration for future career prospects and the "necessity" to keep good relations with those they are "dealing" with. It is, by and large, a game dominated by men and played by their rules of controlled competition, "reasoned" debate, and the use of back-room whispers and good "connections".

"Man and Nature"

The back cover of a recent book of essays by Wendell Berry suggests the pervasiveness and difficulty of the problem. It states that one of Berry's abiding concerns is "to rediscover the organic relationship between God and man, man and nature, man and woman, the individual and society."

Many male environmentalists would take no notice of this quotation, and, if challenged, would defend its patriarchal assumptions on the grounds that they are either unintentional or unimportant ("everyone knows that 'man' includes woman"). Yet

such a phrase epitomizes what is wrong. It assumes that the active human subjects in environmentalism are male. Women are assimilated to "nature" and "God" as objects to which these active human subjects have to rediscover their relationship. Solutions are to be found through *men's* recovering what they have lost, including that part of themselves which is "feminine".

The problem is not just theoretical. People who see women, not as subjects, but as passive adjuncts to men, will view the world and everything that takes place in it, through narrow, dark tunnels. They will assume that their reactions, their analyses and their conclusions are complete. They will ignore the experience and value of women's resistance to the forces which breed and feed on wars, genocide, centralization of power, corruption and intolerance. The views that have evolved among women out of their struggles for survival and freedom and protection of their natural surroundings will be invisible to them except insofar as they echo men's views. As a result, the structural roots of the environmental crisis — in industrialism, in commoditization, in commercialism and in competition and greed — will only ever be partially uncovered. In 'Liberation Ecology', a recent editorial in *The Ecologist*, Nicholas Hildyard argues that environmental movements will have little relevance or success unless they are prepared to address the social issues of power and oppression. Many of these issues — such as the power of professions and other commercial élites; the threatening hegemony of Western culture; the insane contest for greater efficiency; the rise of religious fundamentalism; the coercive nature of population control policies; the sexual oppression of prostitution, rape, marriage, pornography and monogamy;² and the increasing rate of violence directed at women — are being addressed, and in some cases can only be addressed, by women and by feminists.

Patriarchy is not only oppressive to women. What it establishes is a hierarchy that privileges, first and foremost, a minority of men who conform most successfully to the masculine image. It excludes women firstly, but also men who are open about their homosexuality, less articulate men, those who are indifferent to being counted as "one of the boys", and barely tolerates those who admit to being unsure of anything. If the movement continues down this path, it will become increasingly irrelevant to larger numbers of people and is in danger of being betrayed by its leaders. The commitment of the movement's leaders is, more often than not, divided between their avowed vision for justice and a desire to see "things" done. In the mistaken belief that achievement requires quick, decisive action, they are open to being coopted by those they are locked in combat with. More and more time will be spent at negotiating tables, international conferences and business lunches. Meanwhile, those not privy to these discussions will be left to make sense out of increasingly meaningless rhetoric.

Coooption of Feminists

So far, feminist agitation has succeeded only to a limited extent. True, the use of gender-specific language is on the decline; women's advocacy groups have been formed; and some attention is now given to "gender analysis" in many development documents. More significantly, the rise of ecofeminism as an autonomous movement has forced the issue into many journals

and conferences. Yet feminists continue to be coopted within the movement and their critiques deflected.

On the conceptual level, many environmental movement theorists attempt to coopt ecofeminism by subsuming it within, or placing it alongside, other schools of thought such as deep ecology or social ecology. Ecofeminism resists such categorization, however. While it shares many of the views of such schools — for example, that social domination is related to the domination of nature and that the ideology that divides humans from nature must be dismantled — no other theory takes criticism of patriarchy to be so fundamental to the analysis of science and technology, Marxist theory, mainstream economics, development theory, environmental ethics and green politics.

On the institutional level, feminists are coopted when women's units are created within existing organizations, thus dividing "women's issues" from the "real work". It also detracts from the emergence of an autonomous political force which could challenge the established order. Things stay much as they were, with only the occasional tinkering to make it appear as if the men in charge are taking the complaints seriously.

Cooptation of feminist ideas and movements is nothing new. For centuries, attempts have been made to ignore, repress, ridicule and silence women who have spoken out against male domination or who have made significant contributions in any other field.³ The relative obscurity of Anne Conway, a 17th century philosopher whose ideas stimulated the well-recognized work of Leibniz, is a case in point. Likewise, Harriet Martineau who popularized economics in the 19th century; Mary Somerville, an innovative and accomplished mathematician and scientist also of the last century; and Dora Russell, who in the early 1920s was arguing that the human race was but one constituent in a living and organic universe.

The feminist movement shares the same problems of invisibility of other liberation movements under pervasive, entrenched and violent ruling regimes. One tactic repeatedly used is to appropriate women's work and ideas, incorporating them within established institutions or theories and conferring legitimacy only under the patronage of prominent men. Few people know, for instance, that much of the work of John Stuart Mill was done in collaboration with Harriet Taylor, including "his" books *The Subjection of Women*, *Principles of Political Economy* and *On Liberty*. Much scholarly effort since has gone into ignoring Mill's insistence on including Harriet Taylor as his collaborator, and denigrating her own intellectual life. The attempts to absorb ecofeminism into other ecological theories and to compartmentalize gender issues is an attempt to minimize the possible impact of feminist agitation and preserve the status quo.

Crisis Ideology

Women are also coopted through the use of the "crisis ideology". In the current ecological emergency, they are told, they have no choice but to put aside their complaints about discrimination, postpone challenges to the hierarchy, and join in the male establishment's attempts to save the planet. In the era of "lifeboat ethics" they have to decide which child to save. Feminist struggles are a luxury and a diversion. Equality may be part of the long-term plan, but the current crisis requires quick and precise action, best performed by those familiar figures "in the know".

The argument recalls one often heard during independence struggles. For over a century, women have been persuaded to abandon their autonomous liberation groups and combine forces with national liberation fronts. The image of a woman with a baby strapped to her back and a gun in her hand served as a great propaganda tool in national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and Latin America alike.

Yet once the battles were won this image was replaced with pictures of the revolutionary leaders and founding fathers — Lenin, Mao, Castro, Mugabe. Revolutionary laws guaranteeing women new economic power and independence were rolled back in China in favour of more patriarchal relations. Economic reconstruction in Vietnam proceeded along a familiar dual path giving men control of a dominant formal sector while women were relegated to subcontracted manual work, private plots and household production. In post-revolutionary Zimbabwe, prostitution proliferated when the government, unable to provide enough paid jobs to all their ex-fighters, decided to give the scarce jobs to men rather than to women.⁴

Adopting a crisis ideology and expecting "loyalty" to the cause serves the purpose of those who need to protect their positions of power. False choices are offered in the thrilling atmosphere of "do or die" urgency. But the choices carefully avoid real causes and blot out other perspectives.

However a time of crisis can provide the impetus for exploring new ways of thinking. But first the construct of having to choose between limited options must be rejected. The environmental crisis is not just the sum of ozone depletion, global warming, overpopulation and overconsumption; it is a crisis of the dominant ideology. If the environmental movement does not face up to this, it will find itself increasingly irrelevant and impotent. As demands for justice and equality come to the fore, environmentalists will be judged along with all the other "power-brokers" as to what they did to benefit or impede people's and liberation movements. Already there are signs of this. Critics are looking at organizations like Greenpeace and the Worldwide Fund for Nature as part of the (male) establishment that they have to struggle against. Activists in Northern capitals are facing criticism from their more distant colleagues for assuming responsibility, where none was granted, for campaign issues such as rainforest destruction in the Amazon or Sarawak, or the slaughter of seals in Northern Canada.

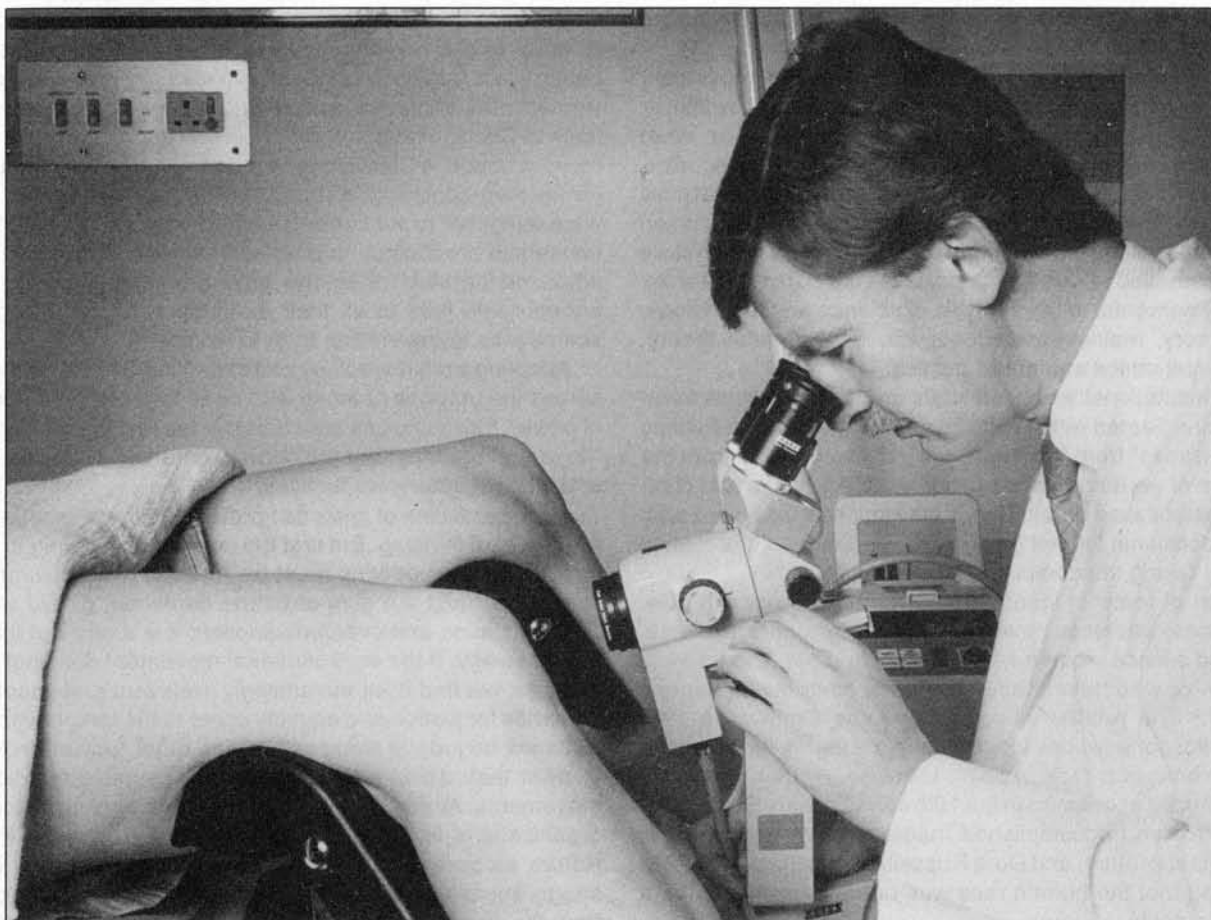
The opportunity is here now to begin to create the sort of society environmentalists say they want. Instead of asking how do they patch up the holes in their sinking lifeboat, they could be asking whether they cannot get out and swim for the shore or whether they should listen to the captain at all. There are innumerable ways of viewing any problem. But closing your mind to some of these views just because they may implicate you in the problem or because they challenge your preconceptions can only lead to false solutions.

Pam Simmons

The contributors to this issue of The Ecologist all present new perspectives on environmental problems. They are all written by feminists. This is a women's issue, not a woman's issue! It would never have been completed without the assistance of the following people: Vandana Shiva, India; Frédérique Apffel Marglin, US; Val Plumwood, Australia; Barbara Duden, Germany; Maria Mies, Germany; Ligeia Gonzales, Colombia; Sudha Murali, India; Ruth Lechte, Fiji; Ronnie Harding, Australia; Ruth Elena Ruiz, Ecuador; Janis Birkeland, Annie Nuss, Joanne Hayter, Australia; Sarah Sexton, Tracey Clunies-Ross, Siân Evans, Sarah Mason, Sally Snow, Larry Lohmann, UK.

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Maggie Murray/Format

"I saw everything as no man had ever seen before . . . I felt like an explorer in medicine who first views a new and independent territory." Dr. M. Sims on the invention of the speculum.

The Seed and the Earth: Women, Ecology and Biotechnology

by
Vandana Shiva

The high value that Western society gives to masculine scientific creation and the correspondingly low value given to feminine procreation legitimates the encroachment of technological development into both the female body and the seed. The new reproductive technologies and plant biotechnologies aim to extend the control of "experts" and the reach of capital into areas which were previously under the control respectively of women and farmers.

In most of the world's cultures, the fertility of the earth and of women's bodies have been powerful symbols of the richness, diversity and vitality of nature and of the reproduction of life and society.

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Throughout the centuries of men's domination over women, however, this symbolism has often been distorted to portray the male as the "active" principle, either as the one forming and creating the world and its creatures or the maker of the "seed" which provides the force and movement to an essentially inactive "field" which is woman.¹ This distortion has been further emphasized in the last

few centuries as Western scientific development has separated the masculine and technological creation of commodities from an increasingly devalued feminine and natural (pro)creation of life.

The arbitrary boundaries which have been created between knowledge and ignorance, modern and primitive, value and non-value, have established the possibility to colonize and control that which

is free and self-regenerative. Women's bodies, the seed and the soil, the sites of creative regeneration, have been turned into "passive" objects which experts can manipulate for profit. The sources of renewal of life have thus been transformed into dead, inert and fragmented matter, mere "raw material" waiting to be processed and manipulated into a finished product.

External control over the sites of regeneration has become not just desirable but necessary for human survival and well-being. Thus the regeneration of forests can only be ensured by conferring a cash value on its wood. Farmers must buy and sell through ever expanding markets to support their families. And women must submit to reproductive control using the most modern technologies to produce a healthier population. The destructive emerges as the saviour.

Defining the pre-existing as "nature", primitive and uncivilized, is essential to the destruction of prior values and rights. For example, Europeans believed indigenous Australians, Americans, Africans and Asians to be closer to animals, and therefore to possess no rights as humans. Their lands could be usurped as vacant and unused. Europeans could thus see their invasions as "discovery", their piracy and theft as trade, and extermination and enslavement as their "civilizing mission".

The erasure of prior common rights became the basis of private property rights. The original societies' labour was transformed into a state of nature, from activity to passivity. Their resources were judged to have been "undeveloped" and "wasted". Their assertion of customary collective usufructory rights became "theft" and "robbery" and they became the dangerous people from whom "property" had to be protected.

The Colonization of Human Regeneration

Science and law, steeped in the traditions and structures of patriarchy, have worked hand-in-hand with each other to establish the control of professional men over women's lives. The witch hunts which raged through Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries are a prime example of the criminalization of the "knowledgeable" female, such as the midwife and the healer, and the extinction of prior rights:

"The distinction between 'female'

superstition and 'male' medicine was made final by the roles of the doctor and the witch at the trial . . . [which] . . . established the male physician on a moral and intellectual plane vastly above the female healer he was called to judge. It placed him on the side of God and Law, a professional on par with lawyers and theologians, while it placed her on the side of darkness, evil and magic. He owed his new status not to medical or scientific achievements of his own, but to the Church and State he served so well."²

The influence of women midwives was further affected in the 18th century with the introduction of obstetric forceps. Midwives were forbidden from using instruments, so the use of forceps became the exclusive domain of physicians who used them much more than was medically necessary.³

In modern childbirth, women's labour and knowledge are ignored; her only part in pregnancy and birth is to follow the instructions of the doctor. The direct organic bond with the foetus is substituted by machines and the knowledge of professionals. Even the mother's love for her baby has to be demonstrated by doctors and technicians. In the view of one medical expert:

"When a mother undergoes ultrasound scanning of the foetus, this seems a great opportunity for her to meet her child socially and in this way, one hopes, to view him as a companion aboard rather than as a parasite . . . This should help mothers to behave concernedly towards the foetus."⁴

When pregnancy was first transformed into a medical condition, professional management was limited to exceptional cases. In Britain in the 1930s, 70 per cent of pregnancies were thought normal enough for childbirth to take place at home with the aid of midwives. By the 1950s, 70 per cent were identified as sufficiently "abnormal" for the babies to have to be delivered in hospitals under medical supervision. As the feminist author, Ann Oakley, states, "the wombs of women are containers to be captured by the ideologies and practices of those who do not believe that women are able to take care of themselves."⁵

In hospital births, anaesthesia and forceps are routinely used and episiotomy is standard practice.⁶ Artificially-induced births and Caesarean sections are on the increase.⁷ In many, if not most,

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cases this sort of technological intervention is unnecessary.

The New Reproductive Technologies

The advent of the "new reproductive technologies" such as *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) has accentuated the shift in power from mother to doctor, and from women patients to specialists who are mostly men. These technologies can be used for shaping both the quantity and quality of children born. They also have a powerful ideological influence; medical personnel are increasingly viewed as the "active" creators, arranging the union of the egg and sperm or transferring the embryo from test tube to womb. Women are the passive vessel, the vacant waiting womb. Although IVF and other technologies are supposedly offered only for "abnormal" cases of infertility, the boundary between normal and abnormal is as fluid as the boundary between nature and non-nature. Doctors now offer IVF intervention to fertile women married to men with low sperm counts. Some physicians have argued that people may use the sperm and eggs of genetically "healthier" people to produce children for themselves.⁸

The introduction of such technology may appear benign until one considers the power relationships within which the technology is used and the inevitable incentive to use it more widely because of the prestige or profit it generates. Now that IVF is available in the North and in some Southern countries, infertility is no longer a biological state to adapt to but a treatable medical problem requiring the intensive intervention of machines and medical personnel. Should a woman decide that the psychological and physical distress involved with the use of these technologies is too great, particularly in light of their 85-90 per cent failure rate,⁹ she is faced with societal or familial disapproval for rejecting a possible, if unlikely, "remedy". The ownership of her own body is eroded by the presence of a group of people who reputedly have superior knowledge of it.

The new reproductive technologies allow for new levels of invasion into the processes of childbirth while reinforcing the belief that women are passive containers in the renewal of life. This idea of woman as a vessel, and the foetus as a "creation" of the father's seed goes hand-in-hand with the breaking of the

organic link between the mother and the foetus. Recent studies on foetuses have reduced mothers to nothing more than "environmental factors". "Foetal rights" and "foetal protection policies" tend to treat the mother as the biggest threat to the foetus instead of the very condition for its life. An excellent example of this is where a pregnant woman was refused alcohol at a hotel in the US on the grounds that she was willfully doing damage to her foetus. Gena Corea projects that by the year 2050, women will be,

"divorced from their own procreative power as we (in our generation) are divorced from our sexuality... These will be women who, from their earliest days, grew up with the reality of IVF, embryo transfer, surrogate motherhood, artificial wombs and sex predetermination technology. From childhood, these women will have watched television news reports involving the 'Storage Authority', that is, the board in charge of frozen sperm, eggs and human embryos."¹⁰

Women's reproductive power will have been destroyed by the colonizing forces of modern technology, professionalism and commercialism.

The Colonization of Plant Regeneration

These same forces also seek to extend their control over the regeneration of plants. The seed and the soil are central to the maintenance of life on our planet. The seed represents regenerative power, and the soil the living fertility from which all life derives nourishment and growth. The earth's fertility has long been represented by a woman's image; in India, for example, it is worshipped in the form of goddesses such as Shakti, Jagatdhatri, Kali



The goddess Isis, from *Oedipus Aegypticus* (1652). The pail in her left hand is irrigating the earth; the moon's rays on her womb fertilize the earth; the snakes in her headdress symbolize renewal and the grain the seasonal harvest.

and Durga. In ancient Europe and the Near East, the goddesses of earth, nature and fertility included Gaia, Isis, Ceres and Diana.

The "colonization" and commoditization of the seed is made possible with the use of biotechnology and property rights. These provide the entry for capital that private industry needs in order to control plant breeding and commercial seed production.¹¹ The insistent demands for patent protection in agriculture have the primary aim of preventing farmers from carrying out their own innovations and regenerating crops from commercial seeds without paying royalties to the seed corporations.

The transformation of a common resource into a commodity, and of a naturally regenerating resource into a purchased "input", changes the nature of the seed and of agriculture itself. By robbing

peasants of their means of livelihood and the control over their production, modern agricultural technologies create poverty and underdevelopment. As in the case of women's regenerative processes, the first step in the colonizing process is the reduction of nature to a mechanistic metaphor. A text book on high-yielding crop varieties states:

"Plants are the primary factory of agriculture where seeds are like the 'machine', fertilizers and water are like the fuel; herbicides, pesticides, equipment, credits and technical know-how are accelerators, to increase the output of this industry. The output in the plant industry is directly correlated with the genetic potential for the seeds to make use of the cash and non-cash inputs."¹²

Intellectual property rights — patents — are central to the colonization of plant regeneration. However, like land titles, patents on "new" products can only be given on the assumption of "emptiness". Just as the prior "ownership" rights to their lands were denied to the original inhabitants of the colonies of the Europeans, so the property claims on genetically manipulated plants deny prior plant breeding by natural and human selection. Living resources are rendered dead. The use of new technologies constitutes ownership. In the view of one author, only when farmers' seed varieties are mixed or crossed with other inbred varieties in laboratories does "real plant breeding" begin. This is defined as, "the long laborious expensive and always risky process of backcrossing and other means required to first make genetic sense out of the chaos created by the foreign germplasm and eventually make dollars and sense from a marketable product."¹³

Like the midwives of the past four centuries, the expertise and knowledge of farmers is denied. History and prior values are ignored. The creation boundary is fixed to exclude the thousands of years of seed selection by farmers as well as their knowledge of natural fertilizers, traditional irrigation techniques, the benefits of diversity and the nutritional qualities of their crops. Self-regenerating seeds are treated as "primitive" and as "raw" germplasm for a finished, improved product. The whole, the natural fertility cycle, is rendered partial, while the partial, the "improved" seed, is rendered whole. But the commoditized seed is not "whole"; it requires the addition of inputs of chemical fertilizers and pesticides to continue to produce and reproduce.

The issue of patent protection for modified life forms raises important questions about the ownership and control of genetic resources. In manipulating life forms, the scientists do not start from nothing but from other life forms. Genetic engineering and biotechnology do not create new genes; they merely relocate genes which already exist.

Foetal Rights and Patent Rights

Just as foetal rights are created to split the organic bond between a woman and what grows inside her, patent rights are created to split the bond between farmers and their seeds. Women and farmers resisting this separation become disruptive elements which the state must control. "Improved seeds" and "improved foetuses" are, in reality, captured seeds and captured foetuses. Women's and farmers' activity becomes passivity; used and developed resources become "unused" and "wasted" resources; robbery and intervention becomes a right; and customary rights become theft. Self-determination becomes ignorance.

The violent dispossession of autonomous producers is an attempt to take away what belongs to nature, and what belongs

to women, and to call that theft "improvement" and "progress". Violence and robbery as the basis for the creation of wealth are not only instruments of the colonial past but are also instruments of new colonizations which threaten life itself. Cycles of regeneration are being torn apart and forced into linear flows of "raw materials" and commodities, dependent on modern technologies.

In order to protect life, we must keep alive in ourselves the capacity to make choices about what is truly valuable and subject technological means to judgments about ethical ends. If we do not manage to do this, we will have foreclosed our options to celebrate life in its spontaneity, diversity and renewability.

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Feminism and Ecofeminism: Beyond the Dualistic Assumptions of Women, Men and Nature

by
Val Plumwood

The identification of men with culture and women with nature has been fiercely criticized by feminists who have shown how it is used to justify the domination of both women and nature. While liberal feminists have challenged the traditional feminine ideal, and radical feminists have promoted the replacement of patriarchal values with feminine ones, a thoroughgoing ecofeminism should question the construction of both masculine and feminine identities.

There is now a growing awareness that the Western concept of reason which identifies maleness with the sphere of rationality, and femaleness with the sphere of nature, has provided one of the main intellectual bases for the domination of women in Western culture. In most of its various meanings, "rationality" is defined *in opposition* to one of the similarly numerous definitions of "nature".

The masculine rational sphere of public life, production, social and cultural life and rational justice is thus contrasted with the feminine sphere of private, domestic and reproductive life. The masculine sphere is one where human freedom and control are exercised over affairs and over nature, especially via science and in active struggle against nature and over circumstances. In contrast, the feminine sphere is taken to represent the sphere of passivity and the acceptance of unchangeable human nature and natural necessity.

In all the senses of rationality, the "rational" side of the contrasts is the more highly regarded and is part of the ideal human character. Women, to the extent that they are faithful to the divergent ideals of womanhood, emerge as inferior, impoverished or imperfect human beings, lacking or possessing in a reduced form the characteristics of courage, control, rationality and freedom which make humans what they are, and which, according to this view, distinctively mark them off from nature and the animal. The ideals of the rational sphere therefore give us a masculine ideal of the human.

Wild Men and Passive Women

The concept of nature has been and remains a major tool in the armoury of conservatives intent on keeping women "in their place". It is allegedly nature, not contingent and changeable social arrangements, which determines the lot of women and

which justifies inequality. In the dominant traditions of the West, women have been seen as connected with nature in contrast to the "human" world. However, the ancient traditions connecting men with culture and women with nature are overlain by some more recent and conflicting ones in which unchangeable "male" essence ("virility") is connected to a nature no longer viewed as reproductive and providing but as "wild", as violent, competitive and sexual (as in the ideas of Victorianism, Darwinism and recent sociobiology), and "the female" is viewed in contrasting terms as insipid, domestic, asexual and civilizing.¹

The attitude to both women and nature resulting from the traditional identification has thus not always been a simple one and it has not always been purely negative.² The connection has sometimes been used to provide a limited affirmation of both women and nature, for example, in the romantic tradition.³ But even if women's connection with nature is one that is sometimes accorded some virtue as a "compliment", it still accords women a lower status, and is used to confine them to limited and impoverished lives.

Given these traditions, it is not surprising that many feminists regard with suspicion the view expressed by the growing number of "ecofeminists" that there may be something to be said in favour of women's connectedness with nature, and that there are important connections between the oppression of women and the domination and destruction of the natural world. The very idea of a feminine connection with nature seems to many to be regressive and insulting, summoning up images of women as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body and in unreflecting experiencing of life.

However, there are many reasons why the woman-nature connection cannot just be set aside, but must be seen as a central issue for feminism. First, understanding the connection is essential because it is still the dynamic behind much of the treatment of both women and nature in contemporary society. Second, it is essential for feminism to consider the issue because it has an important bearing on the model of humanity into which women are fitted. And third, the issues with which ecofeminism is concerned can throw valuable light on questions at the heart of

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feminism itself, questions about the masculinity of culture and the nature of male/female domination and possible routes of escape from it.

The connection between women and nature and the way in which they are both treated as inferior is by no means a thing of the past; it continues to drive the denigration of nature and of women's activity and indeed of the whole sphere of reproduction.⁴ For women, their assumed status as nature does not usually need to be explicit, for it structures their major roles in both public and private spheres. Women are systematically backgrounded as housewives,⁵ secretaries and nurses.⁶ Their labour in traditional roles is not accounted for in the economic system⁷ and is largely omitted from human history. Traditionally, women are "the environment" — they provide the environment and conditions against which male "achievement" takes place, but what they do is not itself counted as achievement.

The patriarchal treatment of nature and of human mothers shares the conception of the mother as one who provides without ceasing; whose own needs, if they exist at all, always come second; whose value is determined by the child she produces; whose work is both expected and invisible, its real skill, importance and difficulty underestimated and defined into nature. (This is the conception of motherhood which underlies many arguments against abortion.) The immensely important physical, personal and social skills she teaches the child are merely the background to "real" learning, which is defined as part of the male sphere of reason and knowledge.⁸ The mother herself is defined in relation to her child or its father, just as nature is defined in relation to the human as "the environment".

Humanity and Masculinity

The feminist view that the connection of women with nature should simply be set aside as a relic of the past assumes that the task for both women and men is now that of becoming simply, unproblematically and fully "human". But the question of what is *human* is itself highly problematic, especially with regard to the relation of humans to nature.

The framework of assumptions in which the human/nature contrast has been formed is not only one of feminine connectedness with and passivity towards nature, but also a complementary framework of masculine disconnectedness from and domination of nature. But the assumptions in the masculine model are not seen as such because this model is taken for granted as simply a *human* model. Hence to simply repudiate the old tradition of feminine connection with nature and to put nothing in its place usually amounts to implicitly endorsing a *masculine* model of the human and of human relations to nature. Only a shallow feminism could rest content with affirming the "full humanity" of woman without challenging this model.⁹

Behind the view that there is something insulting or degrading about linking women and nature stands an unstated set of assumptions about the inferior status of the non-human world. Things are deplored or praised in terms of conformity to a concept of "full humanity". But the dignity of humanity, like that of masculinity, is maintained by contrasting it with an excluded inferior class.¹⁰

Feminists have rightly insisted that women cannot be handed the main burden of ecological morality, especially in the form of holding the private sphere and the household responsible for the bulk of the needed changes, and of appealing to women's



Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College

English author Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97). Her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is one of the key works in the feminist canon. Wollstonecraft rejected the feminine ideal and urged that women should take on more of the characteristics associated with men.

traditional self-abnegation by asking them to carry the world's ills in recognition of their motherly duty.¹¹ But women cannot base their own freedom on endorsing the continued lowly status of the sphere from which they have lately risen. Upward social mobility is often accompanied by the insistence of new recruits to the privileged class that they are utterly disassociated from the despised group from which they have emerged — hence the phenomenon of lower middle-class respectability and the arrogant officer risen from the ranks. Arguments for women cannot convincingly be based on a similar put-down of the non-human world.

But much of the traditional feminist argument has been based on such a put-down. For the influential 18th century feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, what is valuable in the human character ideal to which women must aspire is defined *in opposition* to the inferior sphere of brute creation. Thus she begins her *Vindication* by asking: "In what does man's pre-eminence over the brute creation, consist? The answer is as clear as that a half is less than a whole, in Reason." And she goes on:

"For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes.

"Consequently the perfection of our nature and capability of happiness must be estimated by the degree of reason, virtue and humanity that distinguish the individual and that from the exercise of reason, knowledge and virtue naturally flows . . . "¹²

Current Trends in Ecofeminism

Ecological feminism is a body of ideas and practices which has grown up over the last 18 years, especially in the women's, peace and ecology movements. Ecofeminism has encouraged women's environmental activism both in the wider movement and in separate women's groups.

In the West, women have been prominent in the struggle in all ecological areas, but especially in peace, neighbourhood and health issues. In the Third World, where women as rural producers often have responsibility both for the welfare of the land and the welfare of their children, the connection between women's interests and the health of nature is especially apparent.

Ecofeminism is primarily an activist-based movement, but it has also inspired an impressive amount of cultural work, including poetry, art, numerous collections of essays, and, increasingly, more extended theoretical treatments.

Since the theory of ecofeminism results from the application of feminist perspectives to problems of ecology, it is as complex and diverse as feminism itself. Ecofeminists have a common vision of a society beyond militarism, hierarchy and the destruction of nature. But although ecofeminists are broadly in agreement about these goals, they often have different analyses and political strategies in mind for achieving them.

A major division has emerged in recent literature between versions of ecofeminism which inherit the outlook of cultural (or radical) feminism and versions which have closer affinities with socialist or anarchist feminism or with other radical political traditions. This does not, however, mean that there is no overlap between these positions or that they are in every area necessarily in opposition.

Cultural Ecofeminism

Those versions of ecofeminism (mostly characteristic of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s) close to cultural feminism stress the links, historical, biological and experiential, between women and nature, and see their joint oppression as the consequences of male domination. Cultural ecofeminism sees masculinity as formed in terms of separation from and control of both women and what is associated with them, especially nature, and sees the dominance of male values in patriarchy as creating a society obsessed with dominance and control. Cultural ecofeminism aims to remedy ecological and other problems mainly through the creation of an alternative "women's culture" (the "authentic female mind" in the words of Charlene Spretnak) based on revaluing, celebrating and defending what patriarchy has devalued, including the feminine, non-human nature, the body and the emotions.

Cultural ecofeminism emphasizes the quest for a new spiritual relationship to nature, and stresses personal transformation and the (re)empowerment of women and women's values. Women are seen as having a superior relation to nature which is sometimes taken to be biologically determined, so that only a society in which women can limit or control the number and influence of men will be free of aggressiveness and the destruction of nature. For many, the new approach to nature also turns out to be an old one, that of celebrating fertility and creativity

through feminist paganism, a religion celebrating community with the Earth as maternal and alive or as a powerful Goddess immanent in the world. Many cultural ecofeminists aim to combine spiritual and political activities, but still see the spiritual ones as central.

Social Ecofeminism

Social ecofeminists tend to emphasize the social and political aspect of ecofeminism rather than personal and spiritual aspects (although many are also critical of the political/spiritual division). They do not see women's difference as either biologically based or as necessarily providing a model to affirm. They reject any account of men as unchangeable or of the sexes as biologically determined in their relationship to nature or to one another.

Social ecofeminists would argue that it is not so much that women themselves are the model for a better relation to nature — women also are the product of patriarchy and have developed their attitudes and identity as subordinates within it — but that the entire development of the dominant culture and its relationship to nature has been affected by male and other forms of dominance, expressed in the dualism of nature and reason. The task is no less than the construction of a less oppositional culture. Social ecofeminists view nature as a political rather than a natural category.

Perhaps the key political difference between the two approaches is that social ecofeminism does not attempt to reduce all forms of oppression to women's oppression, a feature characteristic of cultural feminism. Feminism has been increasingly moving towards a recognition of women's oppression as only one among many forms of oppression. Major recent trends in feminism have begun to see the threads of gender as interwoven with those of class, race and species. This view positions most of us at the intersection points of these networks of power, sometimes as oppressors, sometimes as oppressed.

The male-dominated political ecology debate has been highly divisive, and has ignored the insights of ecofeminism. But once human and non-human oppression are seen as connected, much of the bitterness of this debate appears as unnecessary. For example, the recognition of nature and animals as oppressed is in *no way incompatible* with the recognition of that domination as linked to, and continuous with, human domination. In fact, it greatly enlarges and extends our understanding of each to see them as so linked, since both gender structures and the domination of nature have helped to hold apparently disparate forms of oppression together as a system.

Rosemary Ruether, author of the first ecofeminist book, *New Woman, New Earth*, published in 1976, writes: "An ecological ethic must always be an ethic of ecojustice that recognizes the interconnection of social domination and the domination of nature". This approach is increasingly appreciated by environmental, social justice and feminist movements. Social ecofeminism helps articulate an exciting political project which could shake the foundations of systems of domination around the world.

Val Plumwood

Wollstonecraft rejects the feminine character ideal, "despising that weak elegance of mind, exquisite sensibility, and sweet docility of manners". Instead she urges that women become "more masculine and respectable". Both sexes should participate in a common ideal which despite some minor modifications (men are to become more modest and chaste and in that respect to take on feminine characteristics) coincides in its specifications with the masculine character.

The Feminism of Uncritical Equality

Like this early form of feminism, the wave of feminism which made itself felt in the 1960s and 1970s attempted to fit women somewhat uncritically into a masculine model of humanity and culture. This position is most closely associated in current terms with liberal feminism, although it is also found in some forms of socialist and Marxist feminism and in some forms of social ecology.¹³ The associated activist strategy is one of uncritical equality, demanding equal admittance for women to a masculine-defined sphere and masculine institutions which are criticized only to the extent that they exclude women.

Women, in this strategy, are to join men in participation in areas such as science and technology from which they have been especially strongly excluded. These areas involve not only the highly valued masculine traits of objectivity, abstractness, rationality and suppression of emotionality, but also strongly exhibit the masculine virtues of transcendence of, control of and struggle with nature. In the equal admittance strategy, women

enter science, but science itself and its orientation to the domination of nature (and human domination) remain unchanged.

Except for a privileged few, the hope of equality for women within these structures will be largely illusory. The masculine model of the human and the individual citizen and of corresponding social institutions has been arrived at precisely by the exclusion and devaluation of women, women's life patterns and feminine characteristics. As Genevieve Lloyd notes, "Women cannot easily be accommodated into a cultural ideal that has defined itself in opposition to the feminine".¹⁴

But even if such an absorption of women into the masculine model of human culture were to be widely successful, it would be objectionable for ecofeminists, because it amounts to having women join elite men in belonging to a privileged class which excludes those counted as less human as well as the non-human. It is a strategy of having women admitted to a now wider dominating class, without questioning the structure of or the necessity for domination.¹⁵ This strategy also ignores the way in which different kinds of domination act as models for and as support and reinforcement for one another, and the way in which the same conceptual structure of domination reappears in very different groups, such as women, "primitive" people, manual labourers and non-Europeans — all "closer to the animals".

Thus a critical and thoroughgoing contemporary feminism must revise and challenge the ideals of both *masculine* and of *human* character. It must take up the challenge to Western culture originally issued by the early feminists to conceive women as just as equally and fully human as men, but it can only do this adequately if it problematizes the dominant conception of the human and of human culture as well as that of the rational individual.

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The Feminism of Uncritical Reversal

What has been variously called cultural or radical feminism has been a major rival to and critic of the feminism of uncritical equality.¹⁶ If liberal feminism can be seen as rejecting the ideals of feminine character, radical feminism (as well as certain forms of socialist feminism) can be seen as rejecting masculine ideals and the masculinity of dominant culture.

According to this cultural critique, the dominant forms of Western culture have been constructed in part at least through the control, exclusion and devaluation of the natural and the feminine. Radical feminists link masculine identity (and in some cases biological maleness) to aggression against fellow humans, especially women, as well as against nature. This critique is based on the perception that while women have been damaged and oppressed by assimilation to the sphere of nature, men have also been damaged and distorted by their distance, discontinuity and opposition to the same sphere. Culture has been deformed by its masculinization and denial of the sphere of reproduction. The real task of liberation for women, therefore, is not equal participation or absorption in such a culture, but subversion, resistance and replacement.

This critique has given rise to several different forms of ecofeminism and radical feminism which try to resolve the problem of the domination of masculine culture by the reversal strategy of giving a positive value to the feminine and the natural. Such a feminizing strategy rejects the masculine character ideal and affirms a rival feminine one for both sexes. Several slogans sum up this position, for example, "the future is



Ecofeminists see nature/culture dualism and the dominant male model of humanity as leading not only to the oppression of women, but also to the destruction of nature and to racism and social inequality.

female", "Adam was a rough draft, Eve is a fair copy". But the feminism of uncritical reversal is just as problematic as the feminism of uncritical equality and perpetuates women's oppression in a new and subtle form.

The Distorting Mirror of Dualism

The concept of *dualism* is central to an understanding of what is problematic in the attempt to reverse the value of both the feminine and of nature. Dualism is the process by which contrasting concepts are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive. Many feminists have pointed to the way in which masculinity and femininity are treated as dualisms, and become excessively polarized. Thus as Alison Jaggar writes:

"Male-dominant culture, as all feminists have observed, defines masculinity and femininity as contrasting forms. In contemporary society, men are defined as active, women as passive; men are intellectual, women are intuitive; men are inexpressive, women emotional; men are strong, women weak; men are dominant, women submissive, etc; *ad nauseam* . . . To the extent that women and men conform to gendered definitions of their humanity, they are bound to be alienated from themselves. The concepts of femininity and masculinity force both men and women to overdevelop certain of their capacities at the expense of others. For instance, men become excessively competitive and detached from others; women become excessively nurturant and altruistic."¹⁷

As a number of feminist and ecofeminist thinkers have shown, dualism is a way of construing difference in terms of the logic of hierarchy — where the more highly valued side (for example, males or humans) is construed as alien to and of a different nature or order of being to the "lower" side (women, nature) and each is treated as lacking in qualities which make possible overlap, kinship or continuity.¹⁸ The effect of dualism

is, in Rosemary Ruether's words, to "naturalize domination", to make it part of the very natures or identities of both the dominant and subordinated items and thus to appear to be inevitable and "natural".¹⁹

Dualism is a process in which power forms identity, one which distorts both sides of what it splits apart, the master and the slave, the egoist and the self-abnegating altruist. But if this is so, clearly we cannot resolve the problem by a simple strategy of reversal, affirming the slave's character or culture, for this character is not an independently-constituted nature but represents an equal distortion and is a reflection in the dualistic mirror of the master's character and culture.

The reversal approach therefore works within the unacceptable choice women are forced to

make between joining men in the realm of culture, constructed as oppositional to nature and the feminine, or accepting their old dualized identity as not fully human, as immersed in a nature conceptualized as inert and passive and as outside culture. Such a reversal approach would perpetuate much that is oppressive in women's identification with nature, and is rightly seen by many as incompatible with feminism. An approach critical of dualist assumptions would, in contrast, insist that women must be treated as just as fully human and as fully part of culture as men, but that both sexes must challenge this dualized conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognizes *human* identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature. The dualized conception of nature as inert, passive and mechanistic would also be challenged by this development.

To free the concept of the human from the connection to the masculine which has lain behind its guise of neutrality does not therefore mean that it should be replaced by a rival feminine ideal specified in reaction to the masculine.²⁰ It is possible to view both men and women as damaged or distorted by the Western mapping of the nature/culture distinction onto gender and by the structures of the domination of nature both within and without the human self, as well as by various aspects of current social systems. This does not mean that we should feel sorry for both men and women and regard them as equally "victimized" or as equally positioned with respect to constructive change. But it does mean that neither of the sexes as they are now can unproblematically provide a model for a suitable alternative; both masculine and feminine identities require renegotiation. Breaking the dualism involves affirming and reconceptualizing both nature and human identity, as well as reconceptualizing the relationship between them in non-hierarchical ways.

The Third Wave of Feminism

Although it is essential to acknowledge ecofeminism as diverse and as containing, in varying degrees of development, different

and sometimes conflicting positions and political commitments,²¹ a basic assumption common to all ecofeminist positions is the rejection of the assumed inferiority of women and nature and of the superiority of reason, humanity and culture. The ecofeminism of uncritical reversal, however, while rejecting the assumption of the inferiority of nature, does not challenge the dualistic constructions of woman/nature and culture/nature. A more complete and critical ecofeminism would go beyond both the feminism of equality and that of reversal, and would call into question the dualistic construction of both masculine and feminine identities and of the concept of the human.

Such an ecofeminism would contain no assumptions which were not acceptable from a feminist standpoint, and would represent a fuller development of feminist thought in taking better account of the category of nature which is the key to so much of women's past and present oppression. As a political movement, it would represent women's preparedness to move to a further stage in their relations with nature, beyond that of powerless inclusion, and beyond that of reaction against their old exclusion from culture, to an active, deliberate and reflective positioning of themselves with nature against a destructive and dualizing form of culture.

An ecofeminism which takes into account a critique of dualism is a highly integrative one and has a claim to be a third wave or stage of feminism moving beyond the conventional divisions in feminist theory.²² It is not a tsunami, a freak tidal

wave which has appeared out of nowhere sweeping all before it, but rather is built on the work of other forms of feminism, and hence has a basis for partial agreement with each. From early and liberal feminism, it would take the impulse to integrate women fully as part of human culture. From socialist feminism, it can draw an understanding of the processes and structures of power and domination which are expressed in these dualisms. From radical feminism, it would take the critique of the masculinity of dominant culture, and the aspiration to replace it, to affirm what has been denigrated and to end its subordination.

This third wave can also have an important role in connecting feminism with other social movements. The dualisms which have characterized Western culture, and which are linked philosophically to the dominance of reason, also correspond in important ways to its main forms of repression, alienation and domination. Thus the dualisms of human/nature, male/female, reason/emotion, civilization/primitive, mind/body and mental/manual have "naturalized" the domination of nature, of women, of race and of class. By understanding their logic and interconnections, we can also make progress in understanding the way in which movements to end these and other forms of oppression can beneficially connect their concerns and projects.

Val Plumwood's book *Gender and Ecology: Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, will be published by Routledge in 1992.

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2. Lloyd, G. *The Man of Reason*, Methuen, 1984, and Merchant, C. *The Death of Nature*, Wildwood House, 1980.
3. Ruether, R.R. *New Woman, New Earth*, Seabury Press, 1975, p.193. As she points out, the romantic tradition should be seen as mainly a counter tradition, if an inadequate one.
4. I use "reproduction" here, following Carolyn Merchant, to include the reproduction of nature, as well as human and social reproduction (see Merchant, C. *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1989). If "reproduction" provides the conditions for "production" to take place, then it must be thought of as including not only the reproduction of the labour force and of society, but also the conditions of the natural world which make life, society and production possible.
5. Mies, M. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*, Zed Books, London, 1986, p.16.
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15. This point is made especially by Elizabeth Dodson Gray, *Green Paradise Lost: Remythology Genesis*, Roundtable Press, Wellesley, MA, 1979.
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19. See Ruether, op. cit. 3, p.189.
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Hysterical Housewives or Committed Campaigners?

Women Activists in North America

The divide between the public world dominated by men and the private one assigned to women is longstanding. Men are supposed to concern themselves with matters such as government, commerce, law and order, religion and education while women are consigned to raising children to respect the institutions of public life. The boundary between public and private life is moveable to some degree, but it is also incredibly resilient.

There are certain rules to the game of public politics which have been established over time by those who play it: keep your emotions under control (although a dignified show of anger does not hurt on rare occasions); present your case in an ordered fashion, preferably in writing; enlist the help of a few influential men; be available at any time of the day (but always give the impression that you are overrun with other urgent demands); and dress appropriately (suit and tie, and carry a briefcase).

Many women who get involved in public life do not want to play by these rules. But they are punished if they do not follow them — and they are punished if they try to. Ridiculing women is a common ploy men use to discredit women's knowledge and their concerns. Cora Tucker is one of many women who face this kind of harassment every day, especially when they dare to move out of the "private" realm into the public political arena.

Cora Tucker

"You know each time I go to a conference and see only women, I think about the first time I went to the [Virginia] General Assembly and I was there fighting about the right to vote and the speaker said, 'We have all these hysterical housewives here.' I used to get upset and go home and cry, 'I'm a hysterical housewife.' I've learned that's a tactic men use to keep us in our place. So when I started

the stuff on toxic waste and nuclear waste, I went back to the General Assembly and a guy gets up and says, 'We have a whole room full of hysterical housewives today, so men we need to get prepared.' I said, 'You're exactly right. We're hysterical and when it comes to matters of life and death, especially mine, I get hysterical.' And I said, 'If men don't get hysterical, there's something wrong with them.'"

Being branded a hysterical housewife, however, is one of the mildest attacks. Women in Latin American social justice movements are raped and murdered. All over the world, women imprisoned for crimes against the state are temporarily or permanently separated from their children, who may have no one else to care for them. Women protesters are sexually molested and intimidated by uniformed guardians of property. Others face abuse at home when they return from meetings or demonstrations.

And there are other ways of discouraging women from joining in and spoiling the public game. Appropriating their actions and then excluding women is a typical tactic, illustrated by the early history of the American Forestry Association.

Mrs Lovell White

In 1900, Mrs Lovell White of San Francisco, the dynamic founder and president of the women's California Club, took up the cause of forestry. She was alarmed by a report that a grove of Big Trees in the Sierra Nevada mountains. She organized a petition which collected 1,500,000 signatures, asking for the trees to be preserved as a national park. Mrs White and hundreds of other women campaigned for over a decade for forest protection. Until 1912, they contributed reports and articles to *Forestry and Irrigation*, the journal of the American Forestry Association, and took an active role in other national conservation associations.

But in November 1913, at the Fifth National Conservation Congress, its vice-

president, Mrs Philip N. Moore of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, did not speak. Nor did any other women from the Federation, the Country Women's Clubs or the Women's National Rivers and Harbors Congress. All these groups had been involved in forest conservation activities and the Forestry Association. A photograph of a banquet held during the meeting showed some 160 men seated around tables. A brief note in a report to this Conservation Congress provides one explanation for the absence of women: "The desirability of . . . an organization (to represent mutual forestry and lumbering interests) was emphasized by the presence (at the 1912 Congress) of a number of men who were no longer in need of the general educational propaganda relative to the conservation of natural resources, but attended the Congress for the purpose of meeting progressive men in their own and related lines and securing specific information helpful in the solution of their own (technical) problems."

As Carolyn Merchant points out: "Conservation and forestry had come of age as technical professions. As such, they were no longer accessible to women. After 1912, the American Forestry Association ceased to print articles or news items on the work of women in forestry."²

Thus, a passionate women's fight to protect forests from wanton destruction evolved into a process of state management under a subsequently-established Forest Service, and a forum for politicians, business and "conservation" groups to seek mutual interests. This was now "men's business"; women were no longer welcome. The consequences of this shift were tragic, as Kathy Hall, campaigning over 60 years later, describes below.

Kathy Hall

"I come from Stewart Springs, a small town nestled in a narrow valley lining a rugged ridge of

mountains called *The Eddies* in northern California. My life is intimately connected to these mountains and the people who live there. Most of the land is public, managed by the US Forest Service, or mismanaged as the locals say. The Forest Service views toxic herbicides as the most cost-effective method for killing off unwanted forest vegetation and improving the productivity of the conifers. The most common herbicides used were 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, defoliants used by the US military to deforest Vietnam.

"People began to experience unusual health problems. Particularly alarming were the high rates of spontaneous miscarriages, the rare moll pregnancy, children born with cleft palates, hearing problems, and low birth weights. In the summer of 1979, community mobilization hit me like a freight train. I became co-ordinator of Siskiyou Citizens Against Toxic Sprays."

Kathy Hall campaigned tirelessly for the next ten years in the region of Siskiyou, a northern county of California. She researched and wrote documents that were never acknowledged by the Forest Service. She collected declarations from residents and accident reports from various agencies, excerpts from published documents, and testimonies from professionals. Kathy Hall herself testified before hearings and spoke at public meetings. She watched the blackmail of a colleague and friend who was forced out of a position on the North Coast Water Quality Board by a criminal charge that was later dropped. And she experienced the very real difficulties of trying to balance public work with private life. Her first marriage ended some time after her campaign work began. She married again and continued her political activities.

"My life during this time was a jumble of feelings. I hated politics and felt like a pawn. I struggled between my desires to lead a calm life, cooking meals for my second husband and children, growing a garden, tending the goats and chickens in the back yard; and my

desires to do something to stop the destruction of the planet. I couldn't just sit idly by watching the forests and people being poisoned. So I threw myself into organizing, gathering information, and politicking. The inevitable tensions erupted; there were terrible arguments. How come the house wasn't clean? You spent how much money on the phone bill? You're going away again for a hearing or a board meeting? So another relationship ended, and I moved with my children to Forks and yet another new life."

Women activists like Kathy Hall do not have wives to wash their clothes, cook their meals, and get their children to and from school. More often than not, they are leaders and organizers — and wives and mothers. As such, it is not difficult to exclude them from public political activities. All you have to do is schedule a meeting for six o'clock in the evening when mothers are preparing the evening meal and helping with school homework. Or you can protest at the noise the children make when they sit in with their mums at meetings because child care facilities are not available. Or you can look annoyed when they leave early to collect their children from school.

Women activists endure the looks, the sniggers and the patronizing "dears" and "luvs" and "what does your husband think about you being out so often?". They tolerate being interrupted, given less time to speak, having the topic changed, asked to take notes, being passed over when important delegations are to be formed or public speeches made. Women activists have to brave the daily sexual intimidation that is every woman's experience if she walks alone or travels alone. But fortunately, they are not always deterred.

Lois Gibbs

"I wasn't really sure whether our success at Love Canal was because we were very, very smart, had good instincts or were just lucky. As I thought about it, I decided as a 'housewife' and mother, much of what I learned to keep the household running smoothly were skills that translated very well into this new thing called 'organizing'."

"Male organizers tell me one of the first things a professional organizer

has to learn is how to suppress pride and ego and let others do it. Well, most of us have learned to do this very well! It's when we feel the other emotion — that is, the need to rise to the challenge of the put-downs and prove ourselves — that we "break" the classic rules of organizing.

*"We can't deny our history and experiences. We can't deny who we are and what we've become as we've evolved from our local work to making a long-term commitment to organize. There's nothing in this that should make us feel defensive. In fact, we should be proud, because we've made our decision to become organizers, not because it's a job and not out of some intellectual political agenda, but because we are committed to this work, heart and soul. Further, most of us have arrived at this point at an incredibly awful personal price to ourselves and our families, a price so high it would make most men go off screaming in the night!"*⁴

Anita Light

Notes and References

1. Cora Tucker began her activist work with the civil rights movement and now works on environmental issues. This quotation is taken from her presentation at the 1987 'Women and Toxics Organizing' conference (Zeff, R.L., Love, M. and Stults, K. (eds.) *Empowering Ourselves: Women and Toxics Organizing*, Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, Virginia, 1989, p.4).
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3. Kathy Hall was coordinator of the Siskiyou Citizens Against Toxic Sprays in California, and is a student at the University of California. These excerpts are taken from her article 'Coming to See the Forest as Well as the Trees in Northern California', *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 2, Summer 1989, pp.123-131.
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'Women in Development'

A Threat to Liberation

by
Pam Simmons

The call to integrate women into development has been taken up by the international development institutions to suit their own purposes. Adopted, as it invariably has been, in a simplistic form, it is a dangerous slogan that threatens to reduce Third World women to "resources" for the international economy. It also wrongly implies that women in industrialized countries are progressing to a position of equality.

No amount of talk about "consultation", "partnerships" and "empowerment" can alter the fact that the principal effect of Third World development, as it is generally practised, is to impose an economic and political system beneficial to a relatively small élite. Indeed, the language of participation only serves to disguise the imbalance of power inherent in conditional transfers of money, technology or education. "Development" today implies a linear, evolutionary process — a single "progressive" path along which countries are graded, according to per capita income, gross domestic product or, more recently, literacy levels and child mortality rates. One path, one scale, one world. This is not the sort of "liberation" women had envisaged and fought for.

Integrating Women into Development

The negative effects of development on women and their significant, but unrecognized, role in economic production was first documented by Ester Boserup in 1970.¹ Five years later, the UN Conference on Women held in Mexico denounced the fact that women had been ignored in development policies. The logical answer to women's continued slide into economic poverty was therefore seen to lie in making them more central to development projects and planning. If

this was done, the benefits supposedly accruing to men in the Third World would also flow to women. Rarely was the possibility raised that the "feminization of poverty" was a direct result of women's inclusion in the development process.²

The conclusion that women's poverty could be alleviated by targeting development programmes at women was clearly of benefit to the major development institutions and their backers. Many economists believed that women's productivity was being "wasted" because it mostly flowed through informal channels, unaccounted and unexploited by the world market. In relation to women, the World Bank states that, "no country can afford to underutilize and underequip more than half its human resources."³ For the Bank, women's productivity only exists in relation to its market value. Its version of integrating women into development is a means to channel women's labour and produce through national and international businesses.

Production for the world market was supposed to provide women with economic security and a better standard of living, the same argument that had been used for the previous three or four decades in relation to rural societies generally. That it had failed to achieve the promised advances in wealth and food security was clear. But this did not prevent development experts from advocating its expansion. And sadly, it did not stir women in the First World to oppose the spread of this form of economic development.

The attempt to integrate women into development, which began as a genuine

effort by women to raise the issues of discrimination and inequality, is based on a number of false assumptions. First, that economic growth is synonymous with development and improved standards of living for all. Second, that women were not part of the post-War development process. Third, that all women want to be (and have the time to be) part of the international economy. Fourth, that economic growth and the aims of women's movements are compatible. And finally, that women in the developed world have progressed further than women in the Third World towards equality with men.

Economic Growth and Underdevelopment

The belief in economic growth as the only concrete solution to poverty, inequality and hardship is slowly being disassembled. Millions of people in the South who know first hand of its false promises need no convincing. In the privileged North, it will take a little longer. A great deal has already been written about the dependency of the Western economic system on exploiting poor people, wherever they are, and on depleting natural resources. Yet development programmes are still based upon increasing the productivity of nations in the global economy.

Integrating women into development is approached by the international agencies purely from the dimension of increasing women's market-determined productivity. Thus the World Bank states that using modern high-response seed

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varieties is advantageous to women because they raise the demand for hired female labour: "They usually require more labor per acre — particularly in tasks typically done by women, such as weeding, harvesting, and postharvest work."⁴ This incredible assertion ignores the fact that many women have been displaced from their own land by discriminatory land reform policies and the expansion of cash crops, and now have no other option than to work as labourers for less than subsistence wages.⁵ It also neglects to consider that women may not actually have the time to do the extra weeding and harvesting, when more and more of their time is taken up in attempting to grow food for their families on degraded lands.

The development projects most often discussed at international fora focus on "income generation", the provision of credit to women and an improvement in their access to paid employment. While calls for income generation projects are sometimes linked to suggestions for improvements in subsistence production and land reform for women, these positive elements are always subordinated to the aim of lifting women's market-determined productivity. These projects do not tackle the exploitation of women in export-processing zones, the sex tourism industry or agribusiness. They do not question the basic sexual division of labour or the international division of labour, in both of which women are placed at the bottom. Nor do they suggest that women might be better off resisting producing goods for international markets over which they have no control. There may be considerable advantages for women in having their own source of income, but this cannot be divorced from the social and political relations within which they must work.

In *The Lacemakers of Narsapur*, Maria Mies draws a vivid picture of the outcome for women of a supplementary income generation business which encouraged them to produce handicrafts for export. In 1977, in the villages around the Indian town of Narsapur, there were about 150,000 women crocheting small lace pieces, later joined together to make tablecloths, shirts and dresses. The industry had first been introduced by missionaries in the 19th century as a compensatory income source for newly-converted Christians who had been ostracized by their communities. It is now run by Indian export businesses. Poor women supposedly used their "leisure time" in the home to provide extra income for their families.



Asian women producing electronic components for export to Britain. Women make up the great majority of the workforces of Asian export processing zones. Their wages are 20-50 per cent lower than those paid to men in comparable jobs.

They were considered to be housewives, not workers. However, they worked up to 14 hours a day, seven days a week, for which they received an average of four rupees a week (approximately 50 US cents).⁶ The women did a double job every minute of the day, looking after the household and children while crocheting lace. Working at home meant that the women were isolated from one another, which made organizing to improve their working conditions difficult, and enforced

their lack of mobility and their dependence upon men. In these ways, income generation schemes can too easily reinforce oppression in the home and in the workforce.

Some credit schemes are successful in assisting women to establish a sound and independent economic base, but this is only in a few rare instances where the participants have real control over the conditions of credit and production. In most cases, the administration of the credit

remains in the hands of the creditor and is given in instalments. It has to be used for pre-arranged inputs (often sold by the creditor) and labour processes, and the producers are obliged to sell to a specific wholesaler, at a fixed price. Responsibility for production errors or crop failures stays with the producers, while the capacity to use market-price fluctuations for extra profit lies with the entrepreneurs and creditors.⁷ No responsibility is accepted by the creditors — in effect the “employers” — for adequate incomes, land ownership problems or a social security system. And as individual debts mount, so manipulation and exploitation of the producers become even easier.

Improving women's access to paid employment can smooth the way to further exploitation, poverty and social dislocation as well. In the export-processing zones in Asia, for example, up to 85 per cent of the work force are women whose wages are on average 20-50 per cent lower than those paid to men in comparable jobs.^{8,9} The women occupy the lowest levels of the factory hierarchy. Housed in barracks next to the factories, the women workers often find both their working and

their dormitory lives controlled by their employers. Sexual harassment and sexual exploitation of these women is rife. As one observer of life at Kaohsiung, Taiwan, recounts, “every evening foremen and managers at the [export processing zone], along with many shopkeepers and businessmen from town... drive up to the dorms in cars and motorcycles and pick up a bored, lonely and overworked woman for an evening of pleasure.”¹⁰ With no private transport of their own and no entertainment nearby, the women have little choice but to accompany these men as a means of escape from their factory life. Improving access to paid employment is no guarantee that women workers will be treated fairly, or be free from harassment, rape and injury. Indeed, in cases such as the above, the opposite is more likely.

Invisible Workers

Implied in the call to integrate women into development is the suggestion that they had previously been excluded. This is blatantly false. What is more accurate

is that they were invisible to development planners, policy makers, government officials and foreign “experts”. Development projects were planned for men but it was women's unpaid and low-paid labour that provided the base for “modernization”. When men were enticed away from their homes to work in industrial centres or on plantations, it was women who took over subsistence production and often cash crop production as well. In Lesotho and Kenya, 40-60 per cent of married women in the country live as wives of absent migrants at any one time.¹¹ When men were persuaded to turn over their land to cash crops in the hope of providing a better standard of living for their families, women continued to produce the families' food on smaller plots of land. Daughters also moved to urban areas to work as factory employees, domestic workers and prostitutes. All of this is, by now, well acknowledged. The proposed solution, however — to make the women “visible” by including them in development projects — is merely to propose a failed “remedy” as a solution for the “side-effects” caused by that very remedy in the first place.



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Development depends upon absorbing all profitable national and regional economies within a global one and smoothing the way for the further penetration of capital and corporations into peoples' lives and livelihoods. Development promotes the hegemony of Western culture, and relegates other cultures to being "traditional" (quaint and preserved) or "exotic" (weird and entertaining). The fact that development has left many millions of people worse off than before should lead to a questioning of development and the cultural and political ideologies it stems from, not to a proposal for more of the same.

Women Resisting Development

The complaint that women had been excluded from development first occurred in the midst of the new wave of feminism which swept across the US and Europe in the 1970s. What was being demanded at that time was equal rights — equal opportunities, equal pay, the right to be regarded as fully "human" and the right to be heard in public.

At the conclusion of the UN Women's Decade in 1985, the position of women in both the Third World and the First had worsened. But Third World women's opposition to imposed "solutions" was gaining strength. Who then took up the call to "integrate"? Not those Third World women, nor all of the women from the First World either, particularly if they themselves had lived in the shadow of Western "progress". It was development institutions which adopted the slogans and the cause. Women's units were created, women's projects funded and women's advocates were appointed to advisory positions. As one development policy officer put it: "Women have . . . taken on another role, another perception in our minds, particularly in the minds of project managers: the idea that women are good to have around if you are involved in project development."¹² It was a whole new lease on life for the flagging development establishment.

At the receiving end of these projects and plans, however, people were loudly protesting. They were screaming out for an end to the schemes that had flooded their land, destroyed their forests, separated children from parents and grandparents, divided men from women, and ridiculed their religions, philosophies and ways of life. The women in these move-



"We are fighting for younger generations whose hunger can be eased by food from the forest" declare farmers in Siao village in Northeast Thailand who have been defending their lands against commercial plantations.

ments were not demanding the right to be included. They wanted to be allowed to decide for themselves what was wrong and how to put it right. In India, women such as Hima Devi, Bimla Behn, Gauri Devi and many others in the Himalayan region of Garwhal, led the famous Chipko movement against further forest "development".¹³ In southern Africa, women formed their own cooperatives to cope with the absence of men and to resist the spread of cash crops. In Maputo, Mozambique, "Green Zones", small independent gardens run cooperatively by women, were set up to deal with food shortages.¹⁴ In Brazil, Ação Democrática Feminina Gaúcha (Democratic Feminist Action of Rio Grande do Sol) was founded to fight against the imposed agricultural and economic system propounded by the state and the multilateral development banks. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) was established in 1984 by a group of mostly Third World women researchers and activists with the aim of providing alternative ideas and methods for achieving justice, peace and development.¹⁵ Every day, thousands of other women are taking individual actions to fight the spread of Western development. The key to their success is self-definition: the antithesis of a development model that measures every country and every citizen on one single line of progress.

Economic Growth and Patriarchy

Among the broad aims of the women's movements are the achievement of peace, equality and justice. Many feminists criticize the inequities inherent in the dominant economic system. Some, like Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva and Bina Agarwal, explicitly link the expansion of capitalism with the further entrenchment of patriarchy.¹⁶ While, in theory, economic growth in a capitalist system could be made non-discriminatory, in practice, the evidence points to the contrary. Introducing equal opportunity legislation in industrialized countries has not altered the ideology that instructs women to work for "love" in the household, to be content with their role as "second-income" providers, or to collude in exploiting other women and men in the Third World by purchasing cheap imported goods.

Economic growth in these countries has resulted in a disproportionate number of women being "dumped" every time there is a slump and being blamed for the ensuing poverty. Every recession sees a renewed pressure on women to leave the formal labour force, either voluntarily or by retrenchment.¹⁷ Concurrently, there are attacks by conservative governments on the welfare system that supports poor women, albeit inadequately. And worse, modernization has only changed the culture of violence directed at women in that it has made it more widespread.¹⁸

If sustained economic growth is dependent on the increasing exploitation of limited resources, then competition to use these resources can only become more frenzied. In these circumstances, all oppressive systems — including colonialism, racism and sexism — will be increasingly necessary to defend the status quo. If women go on defending economic growth, then they are also, by default, defending patriarchal privilege. The growth that has occurred in industrialized countries is built on the "slave" labour of women in the North and women and men in the South. Without it, these countries' economies would have floundered.

Women's Equality in the North

Some journalists have referred to the contemporary period as a post-feminist era. If they are correct, then heaven help our daughters. Women currently receive

Santisuda Ekachai/Bangkok Post

10 per cent of the world's income and own one per cent of the world's wealth as a reward for doing two-thirds of the work.¹⁹ In the North, where "real progress" has supposedly taken place, the picture is the same as on the global level, if of a different hue. Feminists often face the self-righteous indignation of men who supported equal rights legislation in the 1970s and 1980s, only to find that "women want more". They want more, not only because the legislation was never intended to be the whole answer, but also because it has proved much less of a solution than was first thought. Women still receive only between 60 and 70 per cent of men's wages overall in most industrialized countries.²⁰ In the US and UK in particular, women are watching the rapid erosion of hard-won legal rights and benefits in the areas of abortion, social security and health. Sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence appear to be on the increase.²¹ Women-headed households constitute the vast majority of those families living in poverty.²²

The ideological pressure to conform to a male-defined femininity seems as strong as ever. Women's magazines are filled with features on "keeping your man" or "how to look ten years younger". Social problems, such as youth homelessness and children's delinquency are explained as being due to the "breakdown of the family", and by implication the failure of the woman to hold things together. Although the causes of these problems are extremely complex, women are a convenient scapegoat when it comes to assigning blame for social disruption. Is it any wonder that women elsewhere do not want this brand of "equality"? But the assumption behind expanding the development model is that women are somehow better off in the First World. Materially, many of them are, as they share in the takings from the Third World, but socially and emotionally they have made little headway.

Something Different

International development is steeped in patriarchal traditions, not only because all of the major institutions are strongholds of power wielded by men but also because of what development represents.²³ By implying that the Third World is underdeveloped, the development ideology establishes hierarchy, and by making use of unjust terms of trade and debt to con-



Alliances between women's groups from around the world will be of more benefit to women than the multi-million dollar initiatives, plans and projects of the development industry.

trol national policies, it enforces exploitation. Development promotes over all other cultures a single culture which has shown itself to be both destructive and unjust. It reinforces the ideology that a woman's place is marginal to public life through such schemes as supplementary income-generation and through the suggestion that women's voices will only be heard through retargeted development projects. By reinforcing the strength of the international commercial sector, one of the stalwarts of male control, development encourages the further entrenchment of patriarchy.

A different approach is possible — and it is not a new development model. It can begin by acknowledging that a mistake was made in attempting to define what women should aspire to, be it earning cash incomes or studying modern agricultural or medical practices. This is not to say that these should be denied to women, but rather that the choice should be real. And it goes much further than consultation and participation and empowerment which smack of condescension when spoken by those in power. To be real, the choice must be totally under women's control, and the value of other forms of knowledge must not be ridiculed. Economic and social self-sufficiency is surely a better option than integration. Exchange of ideas and goods can still take place but without the threat of disadvantage or manipulation by the party which holds the ideological or economic strings. Too often, cash incomes and

modernization are fundamentally linked to oppressive structures such as the international market, which is increasingly controlled by transnational companies, and a violent world order dominated by a powerful group of men. The very same structures that oppress women in the "privileged" First World.

These shared oppressive structures surely provide the key to the direction that could be taken. Perhaps the best efforts of women in the developed world should be put to resisting the spread of Western-style patriarchy and fighting its source closer to home. It is, after all, mostly men in the First World who own the major companies, control the international organizations, dominate the ideological "think-tanks", visit the brothels in Third World sex-tourism centres and expect deference from anyone they financially "support".

Combating domination "at home" does not mean an end to cooperation. Indeed, it is the beginning. Sudha Murali in India writes to me, "tell me, how do we practically go about delinking the community-based village economy from the market?"²⁴ We both have a similar problem. Her work with the women's *sanghams* in the drought-affected villages of Mehaboobnagar district aims to regenerate the land and forests and resist the encroachment of development officials who would have the women grow cash crops instead of food. The work of First World activists in resisting the influence and dominance of large companies is partly motivated by

concern for women in India but, importantly, also for themselves. Sudha Murali does not expect them to tell her what to do. An exchange of ideas, though, would be useful for all.

When Maria Mies organized a "Women and Development" course in the Netherlands, she introduced women from the Third World to Dutch women.

"Third World women learned that First World women, in spite of their education, their higher income, their greater access to paid jobs, their modern lifestyle, were not liberated but suffered from sexist violence and were sometimes ideologically more fettered to the housewife/mother/lover image than they themselves. The Dutch women, on the other hand, learned that Third World women are not all poor and uneducated, that some were more educated than they were and above all less dependent on the ideology of romantic love and hence less emotionally oppressed."²⁵

As one Filipina student put it, "I have always thought that Western values are good for Western people and Eastern values are good for Eastern people. Now I have realized that Western values are also not good for Western people."

Alliances between women's groups, such as the ones formed to combat sex tourism or the abuse of reproductive technologies, may do much more towards securing respect and equality for women (in both hemispheres of the globe) than will hundreds of women's projects devised by the development industry.²⁶ These alliances are formed, not through the established channels of Third World aid and assistance, but by way of personal contact between groups or individuals. One approach is based on recognition of a mutual oppression, the other approach on superiority and authority.

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F. Apffel Marglin

Handloom weaver in the state of Orissa in eastern India. The weaving technique used in Orissa involves tying and dyeing the thread before the cloth is woven and involves a great amount of skill. All the weaving takes place in the home. The men and women weavers have no term to distinguish "productive" labour from housework.

Women's Blood: Challenging the Discourse of Development

by
Frédérique Apffel Marglin
in collaboration with **Purna Chandra Mishra**

Taboos surrounding menstruation are common in non-industrial societies and are viewed by many as backward superstitions which are oppressive to women. Such a view is based on certain assumptions about the individual which arose in Western Europe over the last few centuries. In a community of weavers in Orissa, India, these menstrual taboos are embedded in the community's way of life and are vital to the continuity of the community and its natural environment. Developmentalists justify their attempts to counter these taboos in the name of liberating women and bringing their communities out of the past. These attitudes, however, owe more to the developmentalists' exalted notions concerning their own knowledge systems than to the peasants' alleged backwardness.

The choice of menstruation as a site to challenge the discourse of development arose from a debate at a conference on develop-

ment and technology. A paper comparing work organization in the West with that in India mentioned that among a handloom weavers' community in Orissa (on the eastern seaboard of India), menstruating women do not touch the loom or even enter the weaving room.¹ The main support post of the loom is a deity and the touch of a menstruating woman would pollute it. An economist at the conference commented that the extension of pollution taboos to the workplace amounted to diminution of human dignity for the women in the weavers' community. He

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also queried whether the women's freedom of choice for a certain form of life was not severely handicapped by such backward superstitions and taboos.

The perception of taboos surrounding menstruation as oppressive to women is found among people from a broad political spectrum.² Since menstrual taboos are almost universal in pre- and non-commoditized societies, it is not surprising that they can become representative of the backward or "less developed" status of non-commoditized forms of productive activity. However, an historical analysis of the assumptions lying behind the concept of the modern individual shows that the perception of societies as lying somewhere along a single scale of "development" may be less a function of their intrinsic characteristics and more a function of the type of knowledge generated by commoditized consciousness.

PART 1: THE HISTORICAL EMERGENCE OF THE COMMODITIZED PERSON

The commoditization of the body and the self, a process which first began in Western Europe towards the latter Middle Ages, is closely related to the commoditization of labour. The work of Foucault on sexuality and criminality shows how the process of commoditization of the body/self was simultaneously a socio-political process in which the state developed institutions that would ensure the reliable availability of productive labour.³ Between the 16th and the 19th centuries, a complex apparatus was developed to map, control, measure and socialize people in order to make them useful and compliant. In hospitals, schools, workshops and the army, discipline was impressed on bodies and on psyches.

In order to appropriate productive labour, labour itself had to become an abstract force, divorced from the concrete activity involved in making a completed object or a completed task. As E.P. Thompson has shown for England, it took a long time to create the disciplined worker capable of sustained and concentrated labour in a setting where work activity neither has an immediate relationship to a finished product ("immediate work"), nor is carried out as part of personalized social relationships ("personalized work").⁴ In immediate and personalized work, the relationship between bodily activity and task is unmediated, the constraints emerging from the task itself as well as from the social relationships involved in carrying it out. Stephen Marglin has characterized this form of work by the word *techne* and he illustrates it by the example of craft work.⁵ Craft skills can only be learnt by directly copying the bodily actions of a skilled person during a period of apprenticeship. The acquiring of a particular craft skill is not mediated by abstract generalizations of the work process, or by a purely intellectual analysis of the way the body must perform in order to achieve the desired result. The verbal accompaniments to apprenticeship are in the nature of directives to imitate, judgements as to the quality of the results, encouragements or reprimands. They are social in nature, grounded in the master-apprentice relationship.

Techne and Episteme

While the craft of the master carpenter, wheelwright or weaver is fully embodied in their physical actions, the embodiment of the knowledge of the production process in a factory is fragmented among several types of workers producing different parts of the product. In turn, the physical movements which the

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factory worker must perform in order to produce something are separated out from purely intellectual knowledge of the production process, which is typically in the possession of the entrepreneur or of experts hired by the entrepreneur. The distinction is not primarily one between physical and mental work but between *two kinds of knowing*: one in which the knowledge is unmediated by analytic reason, lodged as it were in the body, and a knowledge mediated by analytic reason, lodged as it were in the mind.⁶ Stephen Marglin distinguishes the craftsman's concrete knowledge or *techné* from the engineer's abstract knowledge or *epistémé*.

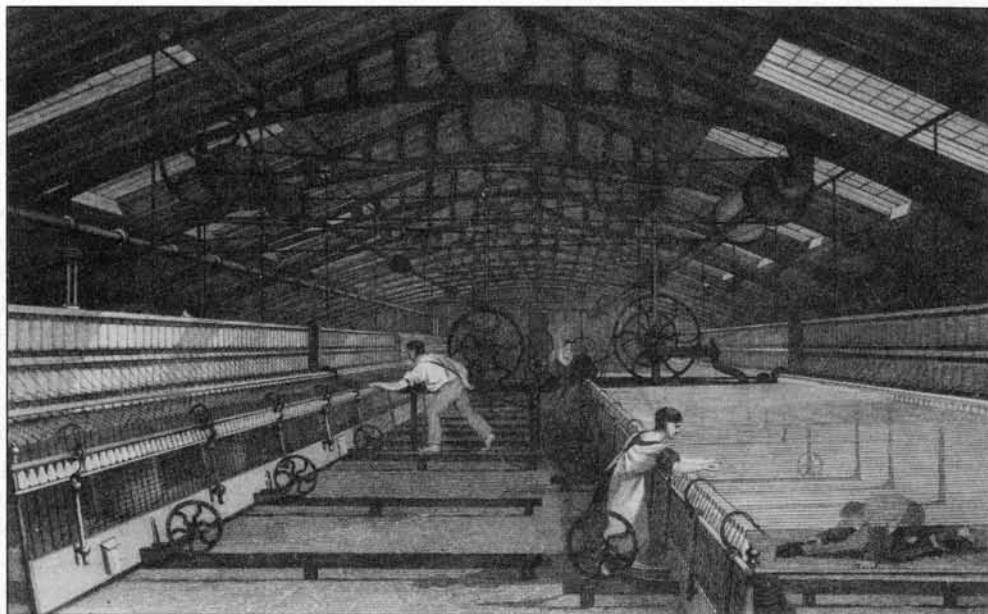
The form and rhythm of industrial work is monotonous, regular, sustained; it requires discipline and punctuality. For people to provide this form of work in a reliable manner, they must be motivated by more than the necessity of survival. Only if it appears both necessary and good from the standpoint of the worker, the seller of labour, will the worker reliably exhibit this type of labouring activity. Discipline, punctuality, sustained attention and the precise execution of tasks needed to acquire their own legitimation outside any specific social, political or religious context. What was required was a legitimating factor that would be decontextualized, socially unsituated, and politically and morally transcendent.

In Adam Smith's discussion of the model of factory work organization — his famous pin factory — efficiency justifies this new manner of production. Efficiency, however, is still tied to the point of view of the buyer of labour. The workers might understand that they would benefit from efficiency in the form of higher wages, but they might weigh the entailments of efficiency against the fact that such form of labour is at once boring and mentally and physically debilitating, a fact acknowledged by Adam Smith himself as well as by Marx.⁷ Efficiency, furthermore, is a relative rather than a transcendent value.

Closely related to, yet altogether of a different order than efficiency, is rationality. Reason had already acquired enormous cultural prestige by the time of the first factories in the 18th century. By the end of the century, in the throne vacated by the regicide of the French Revolution, reason was seated as the new fountainhead of legitimate social action. In contrast to sovereignty, which is embodied in full in the person of the king, reason democratically lodges itself in the minds of all men as Descartes asserted in the 17th century:

"I have noticed, on examining the nature of many different minds, that there are almost none of them so dull or slow of understanding that they are incapable of high feeling, and even of attaining to all the profoundest sciences, were they trained in the right way."⁸

By the 19th century, the theory that most minds, if trained



An English textile mill in 1835. A fundamental change in human perceptions was needed to change peasants and craftspeople into disciplined, punctual and reliable factory workers.

properly, could develop their powers of reasoning was being implemented in the form of free state educational institutions. Education became compulsory; its necessity for the development of what today is called "human resources" imposed itself.

The 19th century also saw the fruition of a development in the professionalization of medicine which created the "medicalized body". The body became a "natural" object, owned by a self, and its workings were to be investigated by medical and biological science.⁹ The body had no will of its own (only in a metaphorical sense), no reasoning capacity. Like nature, it had to be controlled so as to extract its resources, namely labour.

Women's Bodies and the Domestication of Women

The case of women presents a particular problem in the process of the separation of the self from the body. Reason came to be seen in the 18th and 19th centuries as antithetical to the experiences of menstruation, gestation, birth and lactation. The rigorous training of the mind of adolescent girls was seen as a direct danger to their ability to bear normal and healthy offspring.¹⁰ An inverse relationship between the development of the mind and that of the uterus was posited: as the former grew, the latter shrivelled. Whereas the male body's ability to act productively was enhanced by the development of reasoning capacities, in the case of specifically female bodily functions, the development of the same capacities was a threat.

Although the female generative processes were increasingly thought about in terms of production processes as the very word *re-production* indicates,¹¹ the reproductive force of female bodies did not enter the market in the same way that the productive forces of male bodies did. Labour as a commodity can be sold in the first place because it is owned by a self. This self, in turn, owns both a body and a mind, the latter controlling the former. It is precisely by the proprietary relationship between a self and a mind and body (this is what makes

commoditized labour "free" as opposed to slave or serf labour as well as to labour claims on kinspeople) that labour can become a commodity on the market. There are therefore at least two reasons why the relationship between the reproductive force in women's bodies and their reasoning capacities were seen as antithetical:

- The relationship between the mind and the body was intimately connected to the constitution of a marketable commodity, namely labour; a similar connection with regard to the relationship between female minds and bodies would conjure up the spectre of either the sale of one's body or the product of one's body's labour, namely a child. This was inadmissible since it pertained either to prostitution or slavery or both.
- The proprietary status of a self with regard to its mind and body, essential in the constitution of labour as a free commodity would, in the case of women's generative powers, exclude men as co-owners of those capacities or rather of those capacities' products.

Ironically, the use of the production metaphor for the relationship between labour and its products contributed powerfully to seeing women as the sole authors of "reproductive work". Reproductive work became individualized in contrast to non-commodity societies where new people are "grown" by the

work not only of the father and the mother but by a whole array of other persons socially relevant to that task.¹² Here the word "grown" is not to be confused with commoditized societies' notion of "socialization". It involves the physical growth of the child both inside and outside of its mother's body and refers at once to a physical as well as a social process. Physical growth is not something that happens "naturally", independently of the contributions to that process by socially relevant others.

Due to the reproduction metaphor, "making babies" came to be seen as an exclusively female activity. This in turn created the necessity on the part of men to establish their claims on children; this, however, could not be done in the way the buyers of labour asserted their claims on the product of labour, namely by paying wages and thereby alienating the product of labour. The way the internal contradictions generated by the production metaphor were resolved was to assimilate women's reproductive powers to the "natural" fertility of external nature. This resolution had several advantages: it located the control of such powers to an agency external to them in the same way that the control of nature allowed its domestication and the appropriation of its products by human culture seen as external to it. This in turn resolved the risk involved in allowing women's minds to control their specifically female bodies. The external agency controlling these natural powers were men as husbands, as medical professionals, as biologists, psychiatrists and others.¹³

The knowledge of women about their own generative activities was until the middle of the 18th century fully embodied in them just as the *techné* of the craftsman was fully embodied in that person. Women were the only source of authoritative knowledge as to whether they were pregnant or not, whether what they bore was a child or just some kind of growth.¹⁴ However, the *epistemic* knowledge of different kinds of professionals has now completely replaced the knowledge of the woman about her body. The woman gives her body up to the investigation of its interior by medicine and to the "management" of her pregnancy by various medical experts and their technologies.¹⁵

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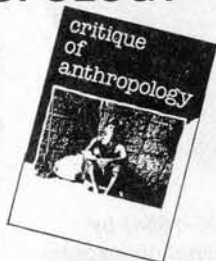
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The Separation Between Work and Life

The commoditization of labour separated out work from all other human activities, such as socializing, gossiping and resting. Life came to be restricted to the private domain where "new life" was produced, where the bodily activities which the civilizing process expelled from the public domain such as sexuality, elimination, cleaning and resting, took place.¹⁶ Due to the contradiction generated by the production metaphor of "making babies", the private domain became the "natural" sphere of women. The private sphere was strongly feminized, the realm of the care of the body, of the emotions, in opposition to the realm of reason, efficiency, achievement and market relations.

The 19th century saw a positive explosion in the ideology of domesticity as the natural calling of women. Woman's very physiology and anatomy at once destined her to the domestic realm and disqualified her from full participation in the public sphere. Menstruation, as a regularly recurring phenomenon seen as plunging women into disfunctionality and irrationality, epitomized women's unreliability. Menstruation proved that women had a weaker grip on will and reason than men. The following excerpt from an address by the President of the American Gynecology Society delivered in 1900 captures this with rhetorical flair:

"Many a young life is battered and forever crippled on the breakers of puberty; if it crosses these unharmed and is not dashed to pieces on the rock of childbirth, it may still ground on the ever-recurring shallows of menstruation, and lastly upon the final bar of the menopause ere protection is found in the unruffled waters of the harbor beyond reach of sexual storms."¹⁷

Woman's nature, her very physiology, destined her to the domestic realm, to maternity, to emotionality. The 19th century French historian Michelet writes of "manly rationality" and of the powers of deduction and calculation as a "virile art".¹⁸ Michelet implicitly contrasts rationality to the feminine realm¹⁹ and explicitly contrasts Western Europe, heir to the Greeks, with the obscurity and ahistoricity of the poetic and intuitive Orient.

Will and reason generate a straight path full of light, known and verified by all; they also generate a steady movement of progress, what we would call today "development". Rationality is contrasted to involuntary intuition and a fitful, jerky, movement of progress. However, there is hope for all, for any man, since rationality gives the means to equality, being democratically lodged in every man's mind as a potentiality waiting to be developed. With the development of that potentiality, man can make himself through productive labour.

From these premises, it follows that the road to women's equality with men — and underdeveloped countries' equality with developed countries — lies in the will to develop their reasoning capacities. With progress in medical science, the contemporary version of the 19th century's ever recurring shallows of menstruation, namely Pre-Menstrual Tension, can be controlled by the appropriate drug and female will to achieve. Similarly if the so-called underdeveloped world wants equality with the developed world, public institutions in the Third World such as schools, hospitals, prisons, the military and state and corporate bureaucracies, must be based on rational principles and must develop the reasoning capacity of its populations and eradicate all "backward superstitions and taboos" and other unproductive practices.

Women's Reaction to Domestication

The view that sees in menstrual taboos a curtailment of freedom, backwardness and superstition arises partly from the reaction of

women in the second half of the 20th century to their domestication in commoditized societies. This reaction — what is called "the second wave of feminism" — has led more and more women to develop their minds and enter the public domain, seeking the equality which the development of rationality promises. Women reject the antithetical relationship posited between their generative powers and their minds.²⁰ The "women in development" discourse is part of that reaction (see Pam Simmons, *this issue*). It is a conjoining of the search for equality by many

women in the "developed" world and by states in the "underdeveloped" world.

Such a search for equality on the part of women in so-called developed societies and on the part of the states of the Third World accepts the terms of the debate as they are set by commoditized logic. This acceptance forecloses the pursuit of alternative paths made by and for people who share a different history.

In the context of Third World societies in general and of the women of the weavers' community in Orissa, India in particular, the understanding of menstrual taboos as signifying a male domination of women's sexuality and a way of keeping women out of the productive labour force amounts to inventing them as commoditized persons. This interpretation implies a thorough commoditization of labour and with it of bodies and selves, neither of which is the case for these craftspeople.

Work and Desire

An important indication of the far reaching difference between commoditized and non-com-

moditized labour is the use of the word "work" among the Orissan weavers. The word *kama* — which I gloss as "work" but also and more fundamentally means "desire" — is used to refer to activities such as sexual intercourse between husband and wife, ritual activity and household chores in general such as cooking and cleaning. It is also used to refer to all activities connected to making cloth, from the spinning of thread to the actual weaving. *Kama* refers to any activity resulting from the desire for something. The weavers' language reflects no division between a non-productive female domestic domain and a productive male public domain.

Men and women both work at making cloth. Weaving is typically men's work; spinning, reeling and tying the threads is mostly done by women although today men can also do this and women are occasionally seen weaving.²¹ All work takes place in the home; it takes place in a social context which tends to be



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Portrait of René Descartes (1596-1654) by Pierre Lingard. Descartes's rational philosophy contributed to the belief that only those men who were in some way defective, be they insane, maladjusted, retarded or somehow underdeveloped, were incapable of developing their powers of reason. Whether or not women's minds were capable of being trained in reason was less evident and became the subject of much debate.

divided along gender lines rather than being divided between a domestic and a public sphere.^{22,23} The use of the word *kama* to speak of intercourse between husband and wife, as well as non-commoditized Orissan' understanding of how conception happens — by the mixing of "female semen" and male semen — points to an understanding of the creation of anything new as resulting from the differential inputs of men and women.^{24,25}

PART II: MENSTRUATION IN NON-COMMODITIZED ORISSA

The following quotation is an ethnographic account of menstrual taboos in Orissa by Richard A. Schweder. The difference between Schweder's interpretation of the taboos with those of Orissan weavers and farmers shows the difference between commoditized and non-commoditized ways of knowing.

"Both men and women believe that the touch of a menstruating woman will shorten the life of the person she touches, and that anything she touches — her clothing, her bedding, her children's clothes — must be washed and purified. Consequently, a menstruating woman does not sleep in the same bed with her husband, does not cook food or leave food for returning ancestral spirits or even enter the kitchen, does not enter the family prayer room or approach the family deity, does not dress her children or wash clothing, and does not touch anyone . . . It is thought by women and men to be a great sin to do so. For three days she does not groom herself or take a bath after dark or do anything that might tempt and attract her husband. After three days of relative isolation and seclusion she purifies herself with a special bath . . . and then on the fourth day she returns to her normal routine of bathing, cooking, feeding ancestral spirits and family members, worshipping deities, cleaning house, napping, massaging the legs of the husband's parents, and tending children . . . Pollution has to do with sanctity, the sanctity of the temple. One must bathe before entering the temple. Menstruating women are not allowed in the temple . . . [Orissan Brahmans] believe that the human body is a temple in which there dwells a spirit or god, the *atman*, the self, the observing ego . . . Adult men think of themselves as "moving gods" and they are treated that way by their wives, who are the first to point out that the husband is to be worshiped . . .

"'I am polluted. Don't touch me! Don't touch me!' [is what a menstruating Orissan mother exclaims when her child comes close]. If the child continues to approach, the woman will stand up and walk away. . . in Orissa touching is transformed from a species-wide elicitor of attachment, comfort, and security to a dreaded instrument of pollution."²⁶

Another view of menstruation is expressed by an Orissan author, Phakira Mishra:

"From the first up to the fourth day of the menses follow the rules given below: do not sleep at day time; do not wear eye black; do not cry; do not bathe, do not apply sandalwood, camphor or turmeric; do not massage oil on the body; do not comb the hair . . . do not do the service of the fire [cooking, worshipping the hearth fire] . . . The menstrual woman must sleep for the first three days on a mat of *kusa* grass and will eat in clay plates or on leaf plates a restricted diet [no fish, meat, garlic, in general no "hot" foods]. She will not meet her husband for the first three days . . . The reason for all these precautions is foremost to keep the [male] semen (*sukra*) and the [female] semen (*raja*) pure. If this is not



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In the 19th century, middle- and upper-class women became strongly domesticated, their physiology seen as rendering them incapable of fully participating in public life. It was conjectured that subjecting women to a rigorous academic education would lead to reproductive disorders, such as the shrivelling of their uteri or the birth of defective children.

done there will be no suitable conception. At that time [of the menses] the body and the mind have a great influence on conception. Depending on the condition of the womb and of the *raja* and *sukra* the energy for the physical and mental development of children takes place . . .

"On the fourth day the woman takes a purifying bath, then with clean clothes and jewels and reciting the *mangala pata* [the auspicious invocation], thinking and speaking nicely she will come to her husband . . . Some women bleed for a long time, seven or nine days. If they have intercourse the sperm will come out with the flow."²⁷

Raja Parba: The Festival of the Menses of the Earth

The way in which the Orissan villagers themselves view the menstruation taboos can be seen through their comments on *Raja Parba* — the festival of the menses of the earth — which takes place at the end of the hot season and the beginning of the monsoon. During the hot season when the sun burns and scorches the earth making her barren, nothing is planted since nothing would grow. Planting has to wait for the first rains which soften and cool the earth and make her ready to germinate seeds. The succession of the seasons is necessary to the procreativity of the

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earth. *Raja Parba* marks the articulation between the hot and fallow period of the earth and the fertile and wet period of planting. In everyday language the same word — *ritu* — means both the articulation of the seasons and a woman's menses.

Purna Chandra Mishra, my collaborator in Orissa, asked a woman in a village near the temple of the goddess Haracandi what *Raja Parba* was all about. This is what she told him:

"This festival is almost like our menstruation; in this festival we do not bleed but we follow the same rules as during our menses . . . In this festival the goddess is at her menses and we follow all these rules as we are of the same kind as her. She is a woman and we all are women. We do not work. We play on swings, tying ropes in trees; we play cards; we do not walk barefoot so as not to give her pain. We decorate ourselves during this festival . . . We walk with friends and sing together . . . People also love us when we take care of our bodies, when we rest and our minds become soft and sweet. With these qualities we love men, and creation becomes possible and we get strong and healthy children. So also our men go to goddess Haracandi to worship her, to please her by offering goats and rams. We women also do all the things to please her, to please mother earth, so that she will give us fruitfulness, and by that she becomes active and ready to bear fruit, by which we all live."

During *Raja Parba* in June 1987, Purna Chandra and I spent three days on the hill of the temple of goddess Haracandi, where men from all the surrounding villages were camping. I asked a middle-aged man why he had come here. This is what he told us:

"We *have* to come here, all the men. We can't stay in the village. All the women folk stay in the villages; it is their festival, they will enjoy it. We come here and we enjoy it here. The women don't do any work; they don't cut anything, not vegetables, not tooth sticks; they don't grind anything, they don't paste spices for curries. They will receive gifts of food, clothes and cosmetics from their parent's house. They play and amuse themselves; they swing on swings. All the women except the old ones make merry. We stop all agricultural work and we come here; we enjoy it very much."

The Context of Untouchability

The remark at the end of the above quotation from the Orissan author Phakira Mishra that some women bleed for longer than three days, and that if they have intercourse after the purifying bath on the fourth day the sperm comes out, makes it clear that menstrual blood is not a substance always characterized by being polluted, that it has no polluting essence. If the woman is still bleeding after four days, conception is unlikely to occur but intercourse is not prohibited. Menstrual blood is considered polluting only during the first three days of flow at the same time as the woman is considered untouchable (*achua*). This is not a matter of the essential nature of substances — let alone the essential nature of women — but a matter of a convergence of acts, times, places and the corresponding transformations of humours, flavours and fluids between humans and their life-environment.

There appear to be at least three components in the rules to be observed during the first three days of menstruation: one pertains to not allowing the woman to make herself attractive by actions such as combing her hair, oiling her skin or decorating herself; the second pertains to asceticism and includes eating a

restricted diet, sleeping on a mat of *kusa* grass, staying in a corner, not sleeping during daytime and not crying. In fact the two could be conflated since abstinence is part and parcel of ascetic practice. *Kusa* grass is said to be purifying and is used in many ascetic practices as well as in many rituals. Ascetic practices are both purifying and also accumulate some kind of force or power.²⁸ The injunction not to cry indicates that the woman must have a certain equanimity not unlike the ascetic who mortifies the flesh and concentrates the mind and spirit. The menstrual

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with the movements of the sun, of the
clouds, with their convergence or
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flow purifies women by taking the dirt and impurities out of their blood.

The third component pertains to not cooking, not worshipping, not entering pure places and not being touched or touching others. The woman's untouchable state can be spoken about in different ways; one way is to say that the woman is polluting and her polluting state is contagious and therefore she must be isolated, must be untouchable. Another way, stressed by the persons Purna Chandra Mishra and I spoke to concerning the festival of the menses of the earth, is to say that women must not work, that they must rest. Two of the men we spoke to used very similar language in which the statement that the woman is untouchable is inserted after statements that the woman must rest: "If they rest it will be good for them. They do no work; they are untouchable; we do not disturb them" and "We do not let her [my wife] work. We consider her untouchable at that time and this rest is very much needed at that time." In this context, untouchability means no work, rest.

The context in which the term "untouchability" is used to mean "do not disturb" is that of *Raja Parba*. In the context of the household and women's monthly observance of menstrual taboos, the term "untouchable" refers to the contagion of their polluted state. This is the aspect that is focused on in the ethnographic passage by Richard Schweder quoted above. Depending on the context of use, the meaning of "menstrual beliefs" shifts. However, the ethnographer here uses the rational language of "objectivity" which couches his description in context-free terms. It is true that "both men and women believe that the touch of a menstruating woman will shorten the life of the person she touches" and in this context it is true to say, as he does later on that "in Orissa touching is . . . a dreaded instrument of pollution" even though generalizing the statement by writing "in Orissa" distorts it by rendering invisible its context-sensitive nature.

But there is more to it than the issue of context sensitivity or that of meaning shifting according to the context of use. The ethnographic writing quoted focuses on the woman as the possessor of a dreaded instrument of pollution; it is one way of looking at it; it phrases a proprietary relationship between the woman and her polluting blood. Such a perspective is not

exactly wrong but it renders invisible the articulating movements between men and women.

A late 19th century poem by an Orissan poet on the famous dice match scene of the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, deals with the same "belief", namely that touching a menstruating woman shortens one's life.²⁹ The context in which the violation of the taboo is framed focuses on the man rather than the woman and vividly describes the misfortunes which would befall a man if he touched a menstruous woman. In such a perspective, there is no proprietary relationship between a woman and her bodily fluids. The focus is not woman as a dreaded instrument of pollution, but man's violation of a woman's *ritu*. What is involved here is a knowing violation of what should be an inviolate period of regeneration necessitating separation. This echoes the words of one of the women we spoke to about *Raja Parba*: "... by rule our husbands go to the temple of Haracandi. We do not like to keep them at home." In this statement it is men as much as women who have to keep the rules. Both men and women actively converge in keeping themselves separate.

It is clear from the above that a woman's *ritu* is not only her menstrual blood — and certainly not "essentially" her blood since it only refers to her blood during a specified period of time — but a convergence of acts, fluids, time and space; in a word, a rite (Latin *ritus*). The woman stays in place, in the corner of the house monthly, in the village, yearly. During the first three days of bleeding, her body is very hot; she is barren; she does no work; she lies fallow; she is untouchable. The men are not hot, they are not untouchable, they move about normally during the monthly bleeding of the women; they move out of the village yearly, during the earth's yearly flow. The women are *ansa*, divisible parts of the earth goddess.³⁰ They are fixed, like the earth. The men come and go like monsoon clouds.

Epic History as Lived History

At the hill of the goddess Haracandi, during the festival of the menses of the earth, the goddess is identified with Draupadi, the heroine of the *Mahabharata*.³¹ Epic history becomes lived history for the inhabitants of these villages.

The dice match in which Draupadi's eldest husband wagers and loses his wife was spontaneously mentioned to me by a local

*Breaking the accord between humans
and their life-environment would result
in a threat to continuity in the form of
disease, famine or social upheaval.*

man. Draupadi was menstruating in the women's quarters but the winner of the bet, Duhsasana, dragged her into the public hall by her hair which was left loose because of her period. Because of this violation of her *ritu*, Draupadi cursed Duhsasana with calamitous results. Not only did Duhsasana die, but his whole lineage ended; the lineage of Draupadi's husbands was also almost destroyed. In non-commoditized India the extinction of a whole lineage is a fate much worse than individual death. The disturbance of Draupadi's *ritu* thus endangered continuity.³²

The connection between *ritu* and continuity harks back to the oldest layers of Hindu culture, to the earliest Vedic literature of around 1200-1000 B.C. There *ritu* is the articulating activity which creates *rita*, the ordered cosmos.³³ This order is a dynamic rhythm in which the sun articulates by its movements a well ordered continuity. However, human beings do not observe the movements of the sun from a position exterior to that movement; by their mensurating activity (*ritu*) they participate in and recreate the cosmic rhythm.³⁴ We are not here speaking of an imitation of nature but of a creative activity which engenders continuity. This activity (*kratu*, a word meaning sacrifice in the Vedas) is a convergence of acts and events, a conjunction of times, spaces and acts. Continuity of human life, what in the Vedic literature and also later is called *ayu*, which refers to a long succession of generations, is not given "in nature" any more than is *rita*, the order of the cosmos, given in nature. Continuity of the ordered cosmos and of the generations are both the result of the proper mensurating activity of human beings.³⁵

Thus to think of *ritu* either in its aspect of women's periods or of the articulation of the seasons as a "natural" phenomenon — be it non-human nature or the biology of the body — would totally miss the point. *Ritu* is both what we would call a phenomenon given in nature and a rule, norm, order, what is "made" by humans, which we (commoditized beings) understand to be the opposite of nature, namely culture. The word *ritu* joins together what we separate; it is a convergence of acts, events, gestures, words, times, places, which if done carefully and properly ensures continuity. The actions of humans must harmonize with the movements of the sun, of the clouds, with their convergence or separation from the earth. Women and men recapitulate in a monthly rhythm the earth's yearly rhythm. Human continuity is guaranteed by actions which insert humans in what we would call "nature". Our language, though, fails us since the term "nature" gains its meaning in opposition to what is not nature, namely culture. It also betrays us since nature is seen basically as passive, whereas the insertion of which I speak is more like a dance than the imitation of a passive nature.

Moving Gods

The "objective" ethnographic writing of Richard Schweder gives the impression that it is only men who "think of themselves as 'moving gods'". Indeed it is true that women are "the first to point out that the husband is to be worshiped". In different contexts though, it is women who are to be worshipped. This is how a male Orissan farmer put it to Purna



Carving of the great God Shiva and his consort the great Goddess Parvati from Hoysaleswara Temple, Halebid, Karnataka.

Chandra and I when we asked him what *Raja Parba* was all about:

"Prutibhi (a name for the earth goddess) is impure; we as human males and females, we live as Isvara (a name of the great God Shiva) and Parvati (the great Goddess, Shiva's consort), so the women do observe it. We are the Isvaras and they are Parvati. So when the mother goddess is impure, they being Parvati they also observe it."

The view that if women worship their husbands, the reverse cannot also be true is an artefact of the unitary perspective typical of the commoditized subject. Such a perspective easily universalizes as well as naturalizes. In Schweder's characterization of touching as a "species-wide elicitor of attachment, comfort, and security", the word "species" naturalizes this view of touching and simultaneously represents Orissans' menstrual taboos as deviant: "In Orissa touching is transformed . . . to a dreaded instrument of pollution".

The Arrogance of the Commoditized Way of Knowing

For the Orissan weavers, bodily substances, in this case menstrual blood, articulate movements between persons as well as

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between humans and the cycle of the seasons. In a timed sequence, men and women must be kept separate and then must join. The separation is a preparation for union, a purification process necessary to the creation of pure and therefore efficacious male and female semen. After the purificatory bath man and woman must unite. Both phases are necessary for continuity; a period of fallow, of preparation, of regeneration and a period of sowing, of insemination. By articulating the movements of humans to those of the seasons, continuity is ensured. Breaking the accord between humans and their life-environment would result in a threat to continuity, be it in the form of disease, famine or social upheaval.

The movements of individual persons do not so much maximize their freedom of choice as seek to ensure continuity by articulating with the movements of other persons and of the seasons. Freedom of choice as a value presupposes the unitary self, possessor of its body, locus of a natural resource. This in turn presupposes labour as a commodity freely available on the market. Continuity of the generations and of the life-world is, in commoditized societies, taken for granted since it happens "naturally". Consequently, practices which derive their logic from seeing continuity as the result of humans' proper articulating activities rather than as being given in nature must necessarily seem devoid of sense. From the standpoint of the commoditized individual, they do curtail freedom of choice.

The type of knowledge generated by the commoditized self is an *epistemic* kind of knowledge, it is "objective", universal, unaffected by context specificity. It is produced by a mind unaffected by a particular body related to other bodies in a particular place at a particular time. Such a mode of thought acquired legitimacy through the successes of the physical sciences in the 17th century and through the necessity to ground in a socially unsituated agency the new social order born in Europe

in the 18th century. The new economic order used this mode of thought profitably to veil the new relations of power between buyers and sellers of labour. The convergence of these three historical conjunctures mutually reinforced each other. The end result is that epistemic knowledge is not seen as one form of knowing among others, but as superior to other modes of knowing. Other modes of knowing are backward, reminiscent of the *ancien régime* before Reason dethroned the king. Therefore, the perception of practices of non-commoditized people as being backward and superstitious, as curtailing freedom and dignity, is not seen as a colonialist perception but as an accurate perception. It reveals that these people must be liberated by being "brought into the 20th century"; in other words, by being developed. Their inferior form of knowledge is proof of the fact that they do not live in the 20th century. Their being alive today is only proof of their blind servitude to irrational tradition which freezes them into a continued past.

A historical analysis of the rise of the epistemic form of knowledge is certainly not sufficient to dethrone it from its current position of supremacy. The observation that this form of knowledge and the social formations to which it pertains are endangering the continuity of our life-environment should at least motivate us to look with less arrogance on practices and modes of knowing which take continuity of the generations and of the life-environment as being dependent on the proper articulating activities of humans.

This is a shortened and edited version of a chapter to appear in *Decolonizing Knowledge: From Development to Dialogue*, edited by Frédérique Apffel Marglin and Stephen A. Marglin.

Notes and References

1. See Marglin, S.A. 'Losing Touch: The Cultural Conditions of Worker Accommodation and Resistance', in Marglin, F.A. and Marglin, S.A. (eds.) *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture and Resistance*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990, p.268.
2. On the sexism of menstrual taboos, liberals, conservatives, capitalists, socialists or communists find little disagreement. Feminists are divided between radicals who find positive valuation in these practices (for a representative statement, see Barbara Walker, *Encyclopedia of Women's Secrets and Mysteries* under 'menstruation') and liberal as well as socialist feminists who share the generally more widespread view of menstrual taboos as sexist. For a representative statement of the latter, see Culpepper, E.E. 'Exploring Menstrual Attitudes', in Ruth Hubbard, Marie Sue Henifin and Barbara Fried (eds.) *Women Look at Biology Looking at Women*, Schenkman Publishing, Cambridge, MA, 1979, pp.135-162. In a recent volume on the anthropology of menstruation, the authors show that anthropology has fully shared in the general view of menstrual taboos as oppressive to women; see the introduction in Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (eds.) *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1988.
3. Foucault, M. *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la Prison*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975 and *The History of Sexuality: Vol. I An Introduction*, Vintage Books, 1980 (trans. from French 1876).
4. See Thompson, E.P. 'Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', in *Past and Present*, 38 Dec. 1967, pp.56-97.
5. See Marglin, S.A., op. cit. 1.
6. I intentionally use the expression "as it were" since the kind of knowledge embodied in a craftsperson must clearly engage mental faculties as well as bodily coordination and the knowledge of the engineer has to materialize itself if not in the actual making of a product at least in the mapping of such activity in the form of two dimensional diagrams.
7. Marglin, S.A. 'What Do Bosses Do?', *Review of Radical Political Economy*, 1974.
8. Quote from *Principles of Philosophy* in Haldane, E. and Ross, G.R. *The Philosophical Works of Descartes: Vol. 1*, Cambridge, 1911, p.210.
9. The work of the historian Barbara Duden shows with meticulous attention to a multi-volume text recording the practice of a German doctor of the early 18th century how the biologization of the body happened in the latter part of the 18th century and how previous to this experience was fully embodied. She has focused exclusively on case histories of females in the text. See Duden, B. *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, Harvard University Press, 1991.
10. See Horowitz, H.L. *Alma Mater Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their 19th Century Beginnings to the 1930s*, Knopf, New York, 1984, Chapter 5, where the author does a historical study of the "Seven Sisters", the seven elite women colleges of the North East of the US. Of particular interest is her discussion of the debate that raged at the time of the creation of Smith College, the first women's college to offer women the same intellectual regimen and training as the elite Ivy League schools for men such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton. The debate centered around the conviction on the part of men that subjecting women to such rigorous mental exercises would inevitably lead to reproductive disorders, such as shrivelling of their uteri or the birth of defective children. This was a direct threat to the survival of the upper classes and caused great alarm. The college survived with its curriculum modelled after the Ivy League's curriculum but the price it had to pay was that its graduates would marry elite men and use their education only to train their sons. If women graduates wanted a career of their own, they had to forego marriage. It was not until the late 1960s that marriage was no longer seen as disqualifying a woman from pursuing a career. The first woman president of Smith came there in the late 1970s.
11. On the production metaphor for the generative processes of women see Martin, E. *The Woman in the Body*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1987, in which the

- author analyses the language of gynaecological textbooks used in the second half of the 20th century in medical schools in the US.
12. The term "grown" is used in a Melanesian context; see Wiener, A. *Men of Reknown, Women of Value*, University of Texas Press, 1976; also Strathern, M. *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia*, University of California Press, 1988.
 13. The scholarship on men's control of female sexuality in the West includes Foucault, op. cit. 3; Ehrenreich, B. and English, D. *150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*, Anchor Books, 1979; Oakley, A. *The Captured Womb: A History of the Medical Care of Pregnant Women*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984; Wertz, R. and Wertz, D. *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America*, Schocken, New York, 1977; and Martin, op. cit. 11. Marilyn Strathern (op. cit. 12) has shown that the understanding of alliance in general and affinal exchanges in particular in terms of men's need to control female sexuality is an effect of our own Western commoditized concepts and logic.
 14. See the following papers by Barbara Duden: 'Quick with Child: an experience which lost its status', ms, Nov. 1988; 'The Pregnant Woman and the Public Fetus', ms, Dec. 1987; 'History Beneath the Skin', ms, Oct. 1987.
 15. In an insightful essay, Catherine Riessman argues that women both resisted and encouraged the medicalization of their bodies; she emphasizes the paradoxical nature of this process for women as well as the fact that the medicalization of women's bodies deflected attention away from social issues, problems being stripped of their political content and popular movements being taken over by the medical establishment. See Riessman, C.K. 'Women and Medicalization: A New Perspective', in *Social Policy* 14, 1983, pp.3-18.
 16. Historian Norbert Elias coined the phrase "the civilizing process" to refer to a process which preceded the commoditization of labour in Western Europe. What came to be seen as "animalistic bodily impulses" had to be controlled during a lengthy period of socialization which began around the 15th century. The civilized body was modelled on the manners and public bodily gestures of the ruling class. As Elias shows, this domesticating process corresponds to the centralizing processes of state formation in France and England. In the early treatises on good manners, the advice is directed at adults, telling them what proper and improper bodily gestures and postures were in "civilized society", namely among the ruling classes. Later the literature was directed at parents and other agents of children's socialization. The civilizing process amounted to creating a central controlling agency in the person with absolute powers over that person's bodily gestures and deportment in public. (Elias, N. *The Civilizing Process: Vol. I, The History of Manners*, Urizen Books, New York, 1978 (trans. from the German, 1936) and *The Civilizing Process: Vol. II, State Formation and Civilization*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1982 (trans. from the German, 1939). On the emergence of childhood as a social category in France, see Ariès, P. *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1962.)
 17. Hall, S. *Adolescence, Vol. II*, 1905, p.588, quoted in Ehrenreich and English op. cit. 13, p.110. For the medical view of women's physiology in France, see Moreau, T. *Le Sang de l'Histoire: Michelet, l'Histoire et l'Idée de la Femme au XIXième Siècle*, Flammarion, Paris, 1982. Emily Martin, op. cit. 11, reviews 20th century opinions on the role of menstruation in discouraging or encouraging women in the workforce; she shows how medical research, in times of labour shortages such as World War II, tended to show that menstruation did not lower women's productivity whereas research findings showed the opposite in times of labour surplus.
 18. Michelet, J. *La Femme*, E. Grévin, Paris, 1842, pp.174, 176.
 19. Michelet writes of menstruation as a disease and woman at her menses as an invalid for one week out of every month; *ibid.*, p.431.
 20. I am here oversimplifying by abstracting away the manner in which this reaction was shaped differently by class and race. The reaction itself is more typical of white middle-class women in the US than of other kinds of women. On this and related issues see (among others) bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman*, South End Press, 1981, and Spelman, V. *Inessential Woman*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1989.
 21. The technique of these weavers involves tying and dying the thread before the cloth is woven and involves a great amount of skill and knowledge — of *techné*. See Marglin, S.A., op. cit. 1.
 22. See also Illich, I. *Gender*, Marion Boyers, London and New York, 1983.
 23. On the anachronism of using the categories of public and domestic domains to explain female subordination in non-commoditized societies, see historian Louise Tilly's critique of anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo's use of these categories in her essay 'Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview', in Rosaldo and Lamphere, *Woman, Culture, and Society*, Stanford University Press, 1974; Tilly, L. 'The Social Sciences and the Study of Women: A Review Article', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, 1, 1978, pp.163-173.
 24. Marilyn Strathern (op. cit. 12, p.80) reports the same understanding in Melanesian societies: "Here there is an explicit division of labour between the sexes, men's and women's deliberate cooperation being likened to sexual intercourse".
 25. Female semen (*raja*) is a colourless fluid emitted by women in a manner similar to the male ejaculate. Menstrual blood then feeds the embryo during its gestation. See Marglin, F.A. *Wives of the God-King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*, Oxford University Press, 1985.
 26. Schweder, R.A. 'Menstrual Pollution, Soul Loss, and the Comparative Study of Emotions', in Arthur Kleinman and Byron Good (eds.) *Culture and Depression: Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder*, University of California Press, 1985.
 27. Phakira Mishra, *Gruhasta Asrama*, Cuttack, 1930, pp.88-89.
 28. In the case of male asceticism, the man by accumulating and storing his unspent semen acquires a glow and a power called *tejas*. In the descriptions of the wife after her purifying bath on the fourth day in the law books she is described as glowing, as emitting a shining light.
 29. *Kapatapasa* by Bhima Dhibara, a fisherman by caste. Purna Chandra Mishra directed me to this poem. He purchased it in the form of a pamphlet at the bazaar with no publication date, and he translated it. The six day observances mentioned in the following quote are to my knowledge not observed today. Today, "traditional" women observe menstrual taboos for three days, even though I have been told that some upper caste very observant women still observe the six day period. Women who hold jobs with salaries or wages in Puri, such as Purna Chandra Mishra's wife, shorten all observances to one day. Or more precisely, when they see their blood, they proceed shortly thereafter to a purificatory bath. This passage from the dice match scene is widely quoted and used didactically:
"Draupadi: Oh Duhsasana, do not touch, do not touch my body, I am at my periods (lit. unable to cook); whoever touches then will get afflictions.
Narrator: The stupid Duhsasana insulted Draupadi as follows:
Duhsasana: You are telling a lie about being menstruous, you are mad and have lost your senses. Tell me, what afflictions will befall me if I touch your body at this time? Don't run away, stay here and tell me what will afflict me.
Draupadi spoke those words: If a man touches a woman on the first day of her period, he will suffer from a disease of the penis. If a man touches a woman on the second day of her period he earns the sin of Guricide. On the third day he earns the sin of killing a brahmin; on the fourth day he earns the sin of killing a child; on the fifth and sixth day he earns the sin of matricide. On the seventh day she should take a purificatory bath going to the river before sunrise, using cow dung and camphor; coming back she should do the service of her mother and father-in-law and at night she should go to her husband for sexual loveplay."
 30. A woman in one of the Orissan villages we visited gave the following answer to Purna Chandra Mishra's question, "What is the reason that husband and wife cannot sleep together during this festival?": "As the goddess is menstruating we women do not go to our husbands. As during our periods we keep a wide gap between ourselves and our husbands, so also we do not go to our husbands during *Raja Parba*. This is the menses of the goddess and we are her *ansa* [divisible part], so we have to be very careful about it." Women are identified with the earth but they are not "like" the earth, they are a divisible part (*ansa*) of the earth. Another term used is "representative" of mother earth. The earth is personified, she is a goddess. The term for "representative" (*pratinidhi*) means also "substitute" or "proxy".
 31. The Sanskrit epic was compiled between approximately the 4th century BC and the 4th century AD. In Orissa, a 16th century (low caste) author, Sarala Dasa, wrote a version of the epic in the vernacular. In Orissa, when people mention the *bharata*, they mean Sarala Dasa's epic. See Boulton, J.V. 'Sarala Dasa: His Audience, His Critics and his Mahabharata', *Image*, Balasore, January 1976.
 32. On Draupadi's curse and her menses see Histebeitel, A. 'Draupadi's Hair', *Purusartha* 5, 1981, pp.179-214; 'Draupadi's Garments', *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22, 1980, pp.98-112; 'Siva, the Goddess, and the Disguises of the Pandavas and Draupadi', *History of Religions* 20, 1980, pp.147-174.
 33. On the meaning of *ritu* in the Vedic hymns, see the resonant prose of Lilian Silburn *Instant et Cause: Le Discontinu dans la Pensée Philosophique de l'Inde*, Paris Librairie Philosophique, J. Vrin, 1955. The following quote from the great linguist of Indo-European, Emile Benveniste, gives us the etymology of *ritu*: "With the aid of an abstract suffix *-tu* Indo-Iranian formed the stem Vedic *ritu-*, Avestan *ratu-*, which designated order, particularly in the seasons and periods of time, and also rule and norm in a general sense. All these forms are referable to a root *ar-*, which is well known because of numerous formations outside Indo-Iranian and belong to several of the formal categories just mentioned. The root is that of Greek *ararisko* 'fit, adapt, harmonize' (Arm. *arnel* 'make'), which is connected with a number of nominal derivatives. Some with the suffix *-ti-* . . . others with *-tu-*, e.g. Lat. *artus* 'joint' and also with a different form of the root *ritus* 'rite'." (Benveniste, E. 'Expression Indo-Européenne de l'Eternité', *Bulletin de la Société Linguistique* 38, 112, Fasc. I, 1937, p.111.)
 34. The word "menses" comes from the Latin "*mens*" meaning "moon" from which the word "*mensis*" meaning month is derived. *Mensis* "is a measure of dimensions, a fixed and as it were passive quality the symbol of which is the moon which measures the months." (Benveniste, E. *Indo-European Language and Society*, University of Miami Press, 1973, p.403). The English "mensurating" ("measuring") comes from this Latin root and is related to "menses". The Vedic *ritu*, however, is a term inextricably related to the sun and to its terrestrial equivalent *Agni*, the fire, and to the Vedic fire sacrifice.
 35. Benveniste, op. cit. 33, p.380. The French word for menses, '*règle*' meaning 'rule', 'norm', 'measure' preserves this aspect of the etymology of *ritu*.

Feminism, Environment, Development, Technology . . .

Some further reading

This was no contest and there was no judging panel. The books I have included here are meant only as an introduction to the topic of environmental feminism and have been selected with an unapologetic bias towards those authors who challenge established "wisdom". This is not just because I am a difficult, uncompromising idealist, but also on the grounds that this "wisdom", which has oozed and wiled its way into all our schools, films, TV serials, bedrooms and journals, has been bred in the minds of the past and contemporary men of the establishment. It is this "wisdom" that we must deconstruct, or at least question, if we are to move beyond just deferring environmental problems.

I have had the most enjoyable task of reading a number of books (mostly selected from what their back covers promised or from recommendations) and putting down a few words about each. Unfortunately, I was limited to those written in English and available in England. This not only makes my selection biased but it also cuts out the countless stories and viewpoints not committed to paper. However, these books do tell different stories to the ones we have been fed intravenously for most of our lives. And they are all written by feminists. Bred, you could say, in the minds of the unobliging women of the world.

THE DEATH OF NATURE: *Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*, by Carolyn Merchant, Harper and Row, New York, 1980.

Carolyn Merchant has thoroughly researched the historical interconnections between the exploitation of nature, commercial expansion and the further subjugation of women that developed in Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. She describes how the organic model of nature, represented as a benevolent nurturing mother, was replaced by a mechanistic model, rendering nature effectively dead, inert and manipulable.

In the name of culture and progress, and in the interests of a rising commercial class, nature and women were devalued and exploited. Rational "man" reigned supreme. Women were perceived to be

incapable of objective inquiry. Their function was to comfort and provide for the well-being of men while disorderly women who resisted domestication and exclusion from public life were to be controlled, partly through the infamous witch trials. All these themes are as relevant today as they were in the Age of Enlightenment.

STAYING ALIVE: *Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, by Vandana Shiva, Zed Books, London and Kali for Women, New Delhi, 1988.

Vandana Shiva coined the term "mal-development" to describe contemporary economic development bereft of feminine, conservation and ecological principles. This is the book where she develops this

idea, using her own experiences as a physicist and an activist to enliven and enrich her thesis.

Staying Alive provides the unique combination of a critique of modern Western science and development alongside descriptions of another living culture with its own sciences and philosophies. Much of the Indian knowledge of ecology lies with the women of India, and Vandana Shiva relates in detail their struggle to keep this knowledge alive under the onslaught of modern development schemes such as the Green Revolution, commercial forestry and major water projects. This book comes alive with the stories of resilience and bravery of these women, and with visions of a different future to the stifling, destructive and violent one now on offer.

PATRIARCHY AND ACCUMULATION ON A WORLD SCALE, by Maria Mies, Zed Books, London, 1986.

I can recall reading the back cover of this book and wondering whether anyone could fulfill what it promised to do. It would provide new insights on the state of the women's movement worldwide; the history of the related processes of the colonization of the Third World and of women; women's work in the new international division of labour; the issue of increasing violence against women; the relationship between women's liberation and national liberation struggles; and why it is that in socialist societies patriarchal coercion has always reasserted itself.

Maria Mies fulfils the promise with her book about the expansion of capitalist patriarchy. I am unashamedly biased towards anyone who challenges the prevailing worldview and Maria Mies does this in a direct, readable and intelligent style. Many times since I have gone back to her chapters on the social origins of the sexual division of labour, the hidden connections between people in the Third World and women of the First, and especially her final chapter, enticingly titled 'Towards a feminist perspective of a new society'. Her following book, *Women: The Last Colony* (Zed, 1988), written with two other German feminists, Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Claudia von Werlhof, also deserves a place on the bookshelves of anyone interested in development, economics or feminism.

RECLAIM THE EARTH: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth, edited by Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland, The Women's Press, London, 1983.

Sexuality, nuclear weapons, childbirth, racism, body image, toxic chemicals, animal welfare and land reform — what could they possibly have to do with each other? Leonie Caldecott and Stephanie Leland have woven them together with other subjects in this anthology of feminist writing to demonstrate that the liberation of women and human liberation are interconnected with the challenge of freeing the earth from patriarchy. "Ho, hum" yawn the cynics, just another calculated manoeuvre to exploit the worldwide concern with environmental crises to meet "minority" interests. How does a woman's grievance about her alienation in hospital during the birth of her child compare to the pressing issue of ozone depletion in the earth's atmosphere? Yet, as long as we persist in perceiving problems such as the medicalization of childbirth as a "woman's issue" and the production of CFCs as belonging in the environmentalists' camp, any "solutions" will be at best temporary, and mostly illusory. The roots of these issues are intertwined, not least in the obsessive desire and contest to manage, control and manipulate human "consumers".

Reclaim the Earth does not provide 50 easy answers to 50 complex problems. That would only contradict its message. Instead it provides the reader with the chance to see some of the connections



between the tools of oppression. The gut-wrenching story of a woman nursing her dying child, the bravery of the "Mothers of Plaza Mayo" in Argentina who stage protests every week about the fate of the "disappeared", and the rapid politicization of Rosalie Bertell who refused to collude with the professional silence about the impact of low-level radiation — all of these are stories which shed light on the source of environmental crises and point in the direction of some solutions.

DEVELOPMENT, CRISES AND ALTERNATIVE VISIONS: Third World Women's Perspectives, by Gita Sen and Caren Grown, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1987.

Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) is a network of mostly Third World women who between them have many years of experience with "development", at its worst and at its best. This book was written on their behalf using their criticisms of the global economic and political trends and their visions of a very different world.

The authors focus on some of the major crises — debt, famine, militarization and fundamentalism — to show how women, in particular, have been increasingly disadvantaged. Importantly, they move beyond this point, by now widely acknowledged, to explain why the conventional approach to these crises is flawed. They challenge the concept of universality, whether it be expounded by the development industry or the Western feminist movement, and see hope in the vast numbers of individuals and groups resisting anonymous inclusion in global schemes. But alliances are not forgotten: "Respect for the many voices of our movement, for their cross-fertilizing potential, for the power of dialogue, for the humility to learn from the experiences of others, are crucial to our vision."

GREEN PARADISE LOST, by Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Roundtable Press, Massachusetts, 1979.

One of the controversies which has dogged ecofeminism over its short history is the use critics and supporters alike make of the woman/nature connection. Elizabeth Dodson Gray's book is one of the classic texts for understanding the hierarchical



dualisms that exist between men and women and between humans and nature.

Gray rejects the notion of stewardship of nature as too paternalistic and instead advocates that people learn to "connect" with the natural world and understand their dependence on it. She challenges the assumption that domination is necessary in any form. Whatever you think of this theoretical stream, this book is a charm to read, with numerous insights into such diverse topics as death, the philosophy of physics, the Judaeo-Christian myths and the neuroses of North American presidents.

WOMAN AND NATURE: The Roaring Inside Her, by Susan Griffin, The Women's Press, London, 1984 and Harper and Row, New York, 1978.

"This is an unconventional book", begins the preface. It is indeed. A colleague, looking over my shoulder as I flicked through the pages, literally shuddered and said that he would find the style difficult. Susan Griffin writes, "my prose in this book is like poetry." It is the sound of voices, an implied dialogue between one paternal and authoritative voice and another, impassioned and changing. What she brings to the surface with her swirling insistent voices is the driftwood that passes as objective and true knowledge, the knowledge on which our Western traditions are based. Eventually the voice of

authority parades before us like the proverbial naked Emperor.

An excerpt from her chapter on timber (and secretaries!): "The trees in the forest should be tall and free from knot-causing limbs for most of their height. They should not taper too much between the butt and the top last saw log. They should be straight. (Among applicants, a person with high intelligence should be sought. She should be an expert typist. A stenographer. She should be diplomatic, neat and well dressed.) Trees growing in the forest should be useful trees."

REWEAVING THE WORLD: *The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1990.

An impressive range of essays from ecofeminism theorists which develop the themes of the anthology *Reclaim the Earth*. One advantage of having a book of essays on a broad topic like ecofeminism is that you can select the ones which interest you most. I started with a short essay by Lee Quinby titled, 'Ecofeminism and the Politics of Resistance', which draws on the insights of French theorist, Michel Foucault. Quinby postulates that any call for a comprehensive theory and coherent practice within ecofeminism (or within any resistance movement) leads to polarization, domination and failure. Instead, theory in the interrogative mode — as opposed to the prescriptive mode — asks difficult and challenging questions of one's own assumptions and practice and allows for a diversity of resistance. Ynestra King's essay teases out the problems with the nature/culture dualism and it provides, along with Carolyn Merchant's contribution, the much-needed acknowledgement of the feminist heritage that many other ecofeminist theorists neglect.

There are numerous other gems tucked away in this book. Judith Plant, while recommending a bioregional, or "home" and community-based approach to living, cautions against adopting any such concept without a feminist perspective. "Home" can be the very place women need to get away from with all of its attendant stereotyped roles. I would add that the concept of "family" is equally problematic. Unfortunately, the book overall has a West Coast North American bias that is never really acknowledged,

leaving the reader with the distorted impression that ecofeminism is strongly linked to the spirituality movements based on old and new religions.

Near the end of the book is a chapter titled, 'Musings on Contemporary Earth Imagery' by Yaakov Jerome Garb. This essay points out some of the qualms I have about such terms as "healing the planet". Images of earth, the planet, engender distance rather than proximity, encourage management and surveillance rather than involvement and can imply singleness and completeness which are concepts easily co-opted to suit grand schemes such as "new world orders". Schemes that never allow for the "disruption" of diversity and opposition.

FEMINISM CONFRONTS TECHNOLOGY, by Judy Wajcman, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.

Judy Wajcman provides a range of examples, historical and contemporary, of male bias in the development and definition of technology. One of the most interesting chapters is the role technology played in the industrialization of the home and the creation of the housewife in Western societies. Building on the prior work of Ann Oakley and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, she shows that the mechanization of household work gave rise to a whole range of new tasks which were as time consuming as the jobs they had replaced.

Judy Wajcman introduces some of the main issues for feminists in the field of science and technology, such as whether

technology itself is in some way inherently patriarchal and what difference more women scientists would make to the field. Her overall argument that technologies bear the imprint of the social contexts in which they were developed is supported by an earlier book by Patricia Stamp.

TECHNOLOGY, GENDER AND POWER IN AFRICA, by Patricia Stamp, International Development Research Centre, Ontario, 1989.

Patricia Stamp delivers a scorching attack on current Third World development practice. Disguised in a cover that makes it appear like a departmental under-secretary's dossier and subtitled 'Technical Study 63a', it nevertheless contains some of the most damaging and well-supported material I have read on technology transfer, appropriate technology and development. As just one small example, she attacks the development discourse based on an imagery of women that reflects only Western political and cultural preoccupations, such as the 1950s virtuous, clean housewife; the 1980s creative, income-generating craftswoman; and the fuel-efficient, tree-planting environmentalist. What does this imagery have to do with the real needs of the women concerned? Not much, Stamp argues.

Pam Simmons

New from the World Rainforest Movement. . .

BIODIVERSITY: SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

With contributions by Vandana Shiva, Patrick Anderson, Heffa Schücking, Andrew Gray, Larry Lohmann and David Cooper.

A provocative collection of essays which challenges the conventional analysis of the reasons for the loss of biological diversity as expressed by UN agencies and big conservation organizations.

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The Atavism of Flighty Females

RETHINKING ECOFEMINIST POLITICS, by Janet Biehl, Southend Press, Boston, 1991, \$10 (pb), 181pp. ISBN 0-89608-391-8.

As the first book-length critical discussion of the ideas of ecofeminism written from a non-ecofeminist perspective, Janet Biehl's book could have been extremely useful. Unfortunately, although *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* makes some good points, it is poorly informed, not only about ecofeminism itself but also about contemporary currents of thought in philosophy and social and political theory. It is concerned less with a fair discussion of ecofeminist ideas than with promoting "social ecology" by rubbishing supposed rival positions.

Biehl fails to recognize the diversity of ecofeminist thinking and instead focuses exclusively on forms of ecofeminism close to cultural feminism. Biehl's "survey" of ecofeminism in her first chapter makes sweeping claims condemning all attempts to link feminism and ecology. This is done on the basis of a consideration of a few authors who can be approximated to her stereotype of ecofeminism as apolitical, anti-rational, home and nature-worshipping, and involving a total repudiation of the intellectual and political traditions of the West. The book therefore fails to engage with the most significant themes of ecofeminism concerning the origins, interconnection and common structure of the oppression of women and of nature and of other forms of oppression, and the rejection of the nature/culture

dualism. Biehl focuses instead on issues such as feminist paganism which are not central to ecofeminism, to which many ecofeminists have no commitment, and which some (such as Rosemary Radford Ruether) have already cogently criticized.

The reason for Biehl's selectiveness appears to be that proper recognition of the range of ideas and options clustered under the label "ecofeminism" would show convergence with social ecology and thus conflict with the book's factionalist political agenda. It is not at all clear why social ecology, which links the destruction of nature to social hierarchy, and ecofeminism should be supposed to be incompatible (although particular forms of them might be). At least one leading ecofeminist, the peace and ecology activist Ynestra King — who is singled out for some of the most outrageous misrepresentation in the book — also calls herself a social ecologist.

It is in her defence of the Western tradition against the forces of the irrational, supposedly represented by flighty ecofeminist females, that Biehl's book is at its weakest. Critics of Western beliefs and institutions are cast either as "atavistic" or as potential Nazis. Biehl wrongly attributes to ecofeminism the complete repudiation of the public sphere and of science and rationality, a view which would indeed make ecofeminism unsatisfactory. Biehl ignores the extensive critique of reason advanced by feminist philosophers, which shows that Western liberal institutions are not gender-neutral in the way Biehl claims.

Biehl sees all cultural value in terms of the public sphere, and places full responsibility for change on the private, which, we are told, women need to "break out of". Many ecofeminists, like many feminists, would argue that men also need to break out of the public sphere and its false universalism and would advocate a political strategy which involves breaking down the public/private dualism.

Equality Among the Directors

Like most liberals who see both present and past exclusions as incidental, Biehl idealizes the Greeks as originators of a universal, participatory, democratic tradition based on reason. This is a mythology liberally sprinkled with "regrettable exceptions" to inclusion: the slaves, women, and "barbarians" who made up

70 per cent of the internal population of the polis; plus everyone and everything else external to it. The classical polis was a corporation with equality only among the directors. Exclusion is central, not incidental, to the political traditions of the public sphere. Biehl's extensive and adulatory historical treatment of classical Greece contains a number of doubtful claims and outright errors. Except for one or two lonely and censored voices, classical Greece did not attribute rationality to humans generally, an insight which would have threatened the institution of slavery. Plato did not take the soul of the world to be female; in fact, he presents in the *Timaeus* a set of metaphors in which matter (chaos) plays the inferior female role ("nurse" or "receptacle") to the maleness of cosmos, representing rational order.

The solution for the world's problems as Biehl ultimately presents it — small-scale participatory democracy (grandly renamed as "libertarian municipalism") as an antidote to abstract "hierarchy" — looks very like liberalism writ small. Biehl has nothing to say to the problems of exclusion and marginalization, which, as she admits, plagued most small-scale civic formations of the past, except that we will have to make sure that it does not happen next time. But the refusal to acknowledge the hidden exclusions (of women and others) in the construction of the public sphere and the inadequacy of abstract equality ensures that it *will* happen next time.

A move towards greater local control is important as a partial strategy, but as a panacea, it is as simplistic as the reductionist versions of ecofeminism Biehl rightly rejects. Social ecology in Biehl's version of radicalism remains caught in the old credo of a single ground of hierarchy and a single solution to domination, a reduction which is fundamentally misconceived, insensitive to difference, and blind to exclusion. It is a different conception of radical politics, as an activity which addresses and connects specific and multiple structures of oppression, which informs the approach of many ecofeminists and which holds the promise for the future.

Val Plumwood

Val Plumwood teaches environmental philosophy and feminist theory and has been active in both the environmental and feminist movements for many years.

by peasant association leaders and members. They also do not neglect the need for famine preparedness, realistic about the future uncertainty of more rural development experiments and the vagaries of the climate.

The problem that each of the contributors deals with, in the context of her or his own speciality, is the need for a democratic local response to development, balanced with a degree of centralized control which is deemed necessary to prevent abuses, to protect domestic markets, and to implement some national agricultural and environmental policies. They search for options that fall between the simple dichotomy of free market economy versus socialist collectivization. This aspect alone makes the book worthwhile reading.

Several contributors discuss the differing impact of rural policies on women as opposed to men, and the implications of this for future planning. As in most countries, development schemes in Ethiopia have been directed at men. Partly in reaction to this, women embraced traditional methods more tightly and are, especially now, an important source of expertise and knowledge. The authors emphasize the need to address women's health and infant mortality, areas which are all too easily forgotten in a society which views men's role in ploughing and harvesting as the most valuable activity in rural reconstruction.

A surprising omission in a book of such breadth of subject is the role of education. In a country where nearly half of its population is under 15 years of age, education will play a vital role in the country's future. It would also have been good to include some discussion of urban development. Reconciling the significant urban population to possible rural options will be an inevitable problem of any new development proposals in Ethiopia.

One of the great strengths of the book is the number of questions it raises. For example, how can the cycle of poverty be broken in a country where its people are already weakened by war and famine and its environment degraded by inappropriate use? How is it possible to strike a balance between state intervention and local democracy? How can gender issues be usefully addressed in a patriarchal culture? The peasants in Ethiopia will be at the core of any successful rural development option and the authors never lose sight of this. *Ethiopia: Rural Development Options* is an important addition to

the library of anyone interested in the future of this country.

Annie Rushton Nuss

Annie Rushton Nuss is a freelance writer from Tasmania, Australia. She moved to Ethiopia in early 1991 and was evacuated with her three children in March.

Utopia and the Forces of Destruction

THE HIGH TECH FIX: Sustainable Ecology or Technocratic Mega-projects for the 21st Century, by Joseph Wayne Smith, Avebury, Aldershot, 1991, £30, 208pp. ISBN 1-85628-216-3.

Joseph Wayne Smith is a philosopher and an active campaigner against the Multifunction Polis (MFP), a science city planned for Adelaide (see John Harwood, 'Technopolis in Australia', *The Ecologist*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 1991). *The High Tech Fix* brings together some of Smith's writings about the MFP with a wider discussion of sustainable ecological economics to demonstrate that the whole idea of a high tech city that will act as a quick fix for Australia's declining economic and social situation is logically impossible and practically unfeasible.

The Multifunction Polis is an extension of the Technopolis Programme that the Japanese Ministry of International Trade and Industry has been promoting for over a decade in Japan. In the hype of its promoters, the MFP will be a "city of the future" that will combine all the best features of integrated living, working, communications and recreation to create an ecologically-sustainable, economically-viable, socially-convivial, "serendipitous", planned Utopia. Moreover, even though this extremely desirable real estate development will have to be funded with copious injections of foreign capital — most of it Japanese — the project is expected to contribute to Australia's attempts to become "The Clever Country" through technology transfers and high tech exports.

Smith uses the Multifunction Polis as

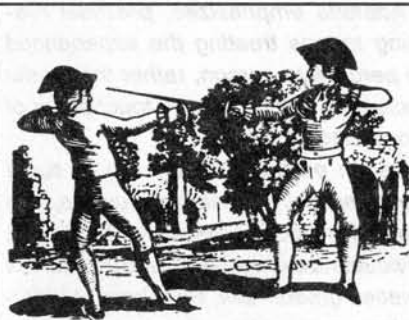
a case study for a polemical critique of the technocratic worldview that dominates so much of the thinking of global power élites. He draws on an impressive collection of newspaper reports, government documents and technical information to describe the history of the MFP project and some of the major social, economic, environmental and philosophical objections to it. Smith then expands on these objections to mount a critique of the whole technocratic, capitalist, élitist thrust of internationalist global economic rationalism — what Smith calls "the blind opportunist growth paradigm". In place of this paradigm is proposed a political economy of national autonomy and self-reliance based on real sustainable development and localized production. The book ends on a pessimistic note, advocating determined opposition to the forces which the author sees as threatening human civilization itself.

Although I am in full sympathy with Smith's anti-MFP position, I believe that this is a flawed book that does not do justice to its cause. At times Smith's argument is obscured by the weight of the details that are piled up, while some very important philosophical points are taken for granted or left unexplained. The earlier MFP chapters do not sufficiently mesh with the broader arguments about sustainable technologies and they have an unfortunate stridency which could easily be used as evidence of racism. The later chapters fail to engage with the feminist critiques of technocentrism needed to add a further dimension to Smith's approach, which remains basically masculinist, despite some references to "men and women".

There is such an abundance of secondary material, quotes and gargantuan footnotes (which contain as much material as the body of the text itself), as well as some rather elliptical English expression, that even the most well-disposed readers would be overwhelmed by information overload. Instead of footnotes, an annotated bibliography would have been of much more use to fellow researchers and students; but with a £30 price tag, *The High Tech Fix* is unlikely to be available to the very people who might make the best use of it, and this is a very great pity.

Margo Huxley

Margo Huxley is a Senior Lecturer in Urban Policy at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology.



Letters

Retiring to an Economic Grave

Dear Sirs,

Is not the difficulty with green economics much more basic than even Larry Lohmann would have us believe — namely that, as Ruskin pointed out so long ago, *economics has no necessary connection with value* (see 'Dismal Green Science', Editorial, Vol. 21, No. 5)? Economics may be associated with genuine value (as when we are buying a loaf of bread) or totally distinct from genuine value (as when we are funding a destructive dam project or selling nuclear materials to the likes of Saddam Hussein). In the shadowland of economics a rainforest can be worthless while an arms factory underpins an economy.

In the political arena the contrast between economics and value was dramatically illustrated recently by the attendance of British MPs for the budget (standing room only) and a debate on the environment (only 12 members could be bothered to drag themselves away from the bar).

Economics has never stood guarantor for human health and happiness. As the Russians have demonstrated, a slave labour camp can be run at a profit — as indeed can prison farms in America. A military junta will work wonders for inflation. Victorian England, in all its squalor and injustice, could be described quite accurately — from an economic point of view — as a prosperous nation.

Those on the debit side of the ledger, Ruskin remarked, were of a retiring nature — they generally retired to graves. Economic forces are now retiring whole species of animals, not to mention numerous humans.

Given the disparity between econom-

ics and value, is it not hopeless to imagine that accountants — practised as they are in financial legerdemain — can save the world? Far better to designate vital areas untouchable — and protect them with the same enthusiasm we show when it comes to protecting oil interests.

Yours unscientifically,

Joe Potts

22 Bryanston Street
Blandford Forum
Dorset
England

Reasonable People and Social Choices

Dear Sirs,

The editorial in your September/October issue, 'Dismal Green Science', by Larry Lohmann, asserts that I am confused. It misrepresents my position, and is liable to confuse your readers as to the substance of the point at issue.

The relevant section of your editorial reads as follows:

"One author, for instance, suggests that to refuse to give wilderness a monetary value and yet to recommend that it be preserved rather than developed:

'is to exhibit confusion and inconsistency. For to recommend preservation is simply to say that it has been in some way compared with development and found to be preferable. Cost-benefit analysis is a way of making the comparison explicit.'

The confusion, however, is all on the part of the economist."

The reference is from my *Resource and Environmental Economics: An Introduction*, page 306 (your editorial actually abbreviates the title).

The quotation from my book is selective and misleading, and prefacing it by reference to "a monetary value" involves misrepresentation. The relevant section of the book is concerned with the question of valuation of alternative courses of social action. It refers, by way of example, to commentary by Broadhead on a report concerning the possibility of preventing development in a wilderness area. I followed a quotation from that commentary with these remarks:

"In fact the report referred to is not a cost-benefit analysis, though this is

somewhat beside the point. Which is that "the real issues at stake" are nothing but the relative values of the development and preservation options. Is the area in question more valuable, in some sense, as wilderness or as a source of resource inputs? To say that intangibles cannot be compared with tangibles is, with respect to this question, to say that it cannot be answered. To say that they cannot be compared and to recommend the preservation option, as Broadhead does, is to exhibit confusion and inconsistency. For to recommend preservation is simply to say that it has been in some way compared with development and found to be preferable. Cost-benefit analysis is a way of making the comparison explicit, and uses a particular criterion, notably the willingness to pay of individuals. In principle, other criteria for valuation could be used for evaluation. Indeed, it could well be argued that additional, or even alternative, criteria should be used. But, whatever the criteria, comparison of the alternatives would be involved. If conservationists were to accept this, they might have a more fruitful dialogue with economists concerning the appropriate criteria."

The point is simple. Social choices do have to be made, and are made. Choice, other than by default, involves confronting an understanding of the alternatives on offer with preferences across them, that is, comparing the alternatives. Reasonable people can disagree about the true nature of the alternatives and/or what sorts of preferences should count. To deny the validity of comparison, as some conservationists do, is to opt out of an important debate, and to say that informed choice is impossible — one may just as well use the flip of a coin. To state the need for comparison is not to claim that there is one uniquely correct basis for it. The matters at issue in the context of your editorial are too important to let its casual misrepresentation pass.

Yours sincerely,

M.S. Common

Senior Fellow

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The Australian National University
Canberra, ACT 2601
Australia

Larry Lohmann Replies . . .

When Socrates insists, in Plato's *Protagoras*, that rational decision-makers (in Common's terminology, people who make "informed" choices and do not try to "opt out" of debate) must learn to use a measuring-stick of value to compare the alternatives with which they are faced, he knows exactly what he is asking for. He is urging a revolution in thinking and feeling which will render all values commensurable: differing only in being different quantities of the same thing. He regards himself as thereby paving the way for a science of practical reasoning which will remove uncertainty, disagreement, disquiet, tragedy, surprise, passion for the unique, weakness of will and regret.¹

Common's picture of practical reasoning is, of course, a bit different from Socrates's. He does not demand that the same yardstick be used for all decisions. But he does hold the Socratic view that each rational choice must be made according to some preset criteria which apply to all the alternatives under consideration. Indeed, like many economists, Common appears to assume that whenever one thing is rationally preferred to another there must be something that the two share which is being maximized, and that if conservationists and economists could only agree on what this should be in any particular circumstance, they would also be able to agree on the best course of action. Unfortunately, however, Common's demand for commensuration, limited as it is, is untempered by any Socratic awareness of the violence it would do to the way people reason in the real world.

Criteria for assessing the "relative" values of certain ranges of "options" are often simply not part of a society's repertoire. The society may even deliberately work to keep it that way. Peasants who oppose commercial logging in their community forests, for example, are not necessarily weighing the advantages of cash against the disadvantages of losing water, food or spirits of place; or the "opportunity costs" of lost income against the benefits of subsistence or spiritual well-being. Instead, they may simply be applying a moral or religious rule in such a way that such comparisons never get started. Pace Common, this is not to "opt out of the debate" over forests or agriculture. It is, rather, to insist on ground rules for that debate which respect the peasants' conclusion that among their community's ends is that of, say, preserving the spirits

of the forest, and that to choose this value for its own sake is incompatible with viewing it as commensurable with other values. To make it commensurable with other values would be, in their view, to change it: hardly a contribution toward either "informed choice" or environmental responsibility.

Criteria for assessing the relative values of a range of alternatives, where they do exist, are useful mainly within the confines of certain techniques in which a goal has been fixed for a special purpose within a wider enterprise. Comparing weights, for example, is usually a part of a larger process, whether it is selling vegetables or checking babies' health. Similarly, it is only for the highly specialized purposes of exchange, accounting and accumulation that people have learned to use monetary value to commensurate such diverse items as land, corn, cotton, iron, labour-time, microchips and biological diversity. Looking to criteria such as weight and monetary value to define rational choice is insufficient in broader contexts in which ends are multiple, mutually irreducible, unclearly specified, only partially determinate, and constantly open to modification.

We can measure people's willingness to pay for various items, but no one suggests that scientific, aesthetic or judicial opinions can be validated by measuring their willingness to pay for being counted right. Similarly, people object to being told that political and moral questions about acceptable levels of pollution are to be fused with economic ones in the single-value criterion of cost-benefit analysis. The constant redefinition of ends characteristic of open minds and open societies also militates against the formulation of any fixed criteria for rational choice in the broad contexts with which Common and I are both concerned.

Ensuring that deliberation on environmental matters amounts to more than the "flip of a coin", in short, does not have much to do with the attempt to isolate "appropriate criteria". Insofar as such isolation is possible at all in broad contexts, it tends to homogenize, impoverish and freeze human ends. A better course is to pay increased attention to, among other things, what David Wiggins calls "deliberative specification of ends" — the redescription and analysis of our plural wants — which, together with a creative response to the particularity of each situation, constitutes "most of what is interesting and difficult in practical reason".²

As Aristotle emphasizes, practical reasoning means treating the experienced and perceptive person, rather than a set of scientific criteria, as the touchstone of rational choice.

If each person's values are to some extent mutually incommensurable, the range of irreducibly plural ends across individuals is even greater, and that across societies greater still. Speakers of different languages often do not share any common adjudication procedures at all when looking at the same set of alternatives. The so-called problem of value incommensurability is thus not merely a matter of not being able to measure fluffy "intangibles" or "unquantifiables". It is, much more importantly, a question of democracy. One of the attractions of commensuration for modern managers, as for Socrates, is that it allows a good deal of democratic discussion to be side-stepped. Once criteria have been set, "correct" data disseminated and preferences polled, anybody can add up the columns of a cost-benefit analysis and say that the result expresses the common will. To block this sort of brutality on the intercultural level, it is not enough to say, with Aristotle, that rational choice rests on the bedrock of an individual's judgment. It is necessary to go further and locate reasoned deliberation in the discussions of groups of people using the different relevant languages in an atmosphere of free exchange. Rational choice in this case means, again, not trying to satisfy "appropriate criteria" set in advance, but rather abiding by what Richard Rorty calls the "virtues of inquiry": tolerance, respect for the opinions of others, willingness to listen, reliance on persuasion rather than force, nondefensiveness, lack of dogmatism and openness to learning.³

Notes and References

1. Nussbaum, M. C. *The Fragility of Goodness*, Cambridge, 1986, esp. pp.51-121 and 290-317. Interestingly, Nussbaum associates the Greek quest for commensurability with a restrictedly "male" view of rationality which sees the agent as an active hunter/trapper, solitary, striving for permanent control, denying receptivity, and attempting to eliminate vulnerability to the external.
2. Wiggins, D. 'Deliberation and Practical Reason', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76, 1975-76, pp.29-51; 'Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 79, 1978-79, pp.251-277.
3. Rorty, R. *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge, 1991; *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, 1979.

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