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## **Ecofeminism and Globalism: A Critical Appraisal**

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## **Ecofeminism and Globalisation: A Critical Appraisal**

Jasmin Sydee and Sharon Beder

### **Abstract**

Ecofeminism offers a useful yet limited framework through which to critique globalisation. Ecofeminism claims that the domination of women and of nature are intrinsically linked. Material ecofeminists, in particular, focus on the material conditions of women's lives locating the source of this twin domination in patriarchal capitalism. These ecofeminists provide insights into the impacts of globalisation on women but their analysis of the causes of globalisation are limited. They identify globalisation as an outgrowth of patriarchal capitalism, insisting on the primacy of gender as the determinant of social organisation and arguing that it is the dichotomy between production and reproduction that essentially defines capitalism. However, the rise of modern capitalism has been more convincingly described by those who focus on the domination of workers, the role of the market economy, and the enrolment of all sections of society through the propagation of the work ethic and the allure of consumerism.

### **Introduction**

Ecofeminists identify globalisation as an outgrowth of capitalism which, according to their analysis, is the locus of social and environmental crises. They argue that the essential characteristic of capitalism is its patriarchal nature. They claim that the material and discursive institutions of patriarchal capitalism require the systematic domination and exploitation of both women and nature.

However, this materialist emphasis is not common to all ecofeminist thinkers. Certain paths of ecofeminist thought are almost wholly spiritual, as theorists and activists explore the holistic value of reality and raise it to a sacred realm. These spiritually-oriented ecofeminists seek to celebrate women and their association with nature as a source of strength, power and virtue. They argue that re-connecting humans with nature, and modelling communities and self-actualisation on the patterns and webs of nature has vast political and structural implications, and, in itself, is inherently spiritual. These ecofeminists wish to break the hierarchies that have been created around difference to re-immense humans in nature.

A materialist ecofeminist analysis has been developed, in part, as a critique of this spiritual ecofeminism. It sees spiritual ecofeminism as failing to come to terms with the effects of capitalism, such as the perpetuation of sexism and environmental damage. In particular material ecofeminists are critical of the tendency of spiritual ecofeminists to endorse essentialism, that is the view that men and women are essentially and inherently different in character and nature.

For materialist ecofeminists the fundamental contradiction of capitalism is not between capital and labour but between production and reproduction. Valued and economically recognised male labour is separated off from invisible domestic female service. This is thought to be the deepest contradiction of patriarchal capitalism because women's reproductive labour remains in nature while men's productive labour is removed from nature. It is their close connection with nature that is said to put women in the position of being able to liberate humanity and nature from capitalist domination in order to create new healthy societies.

Whilst opening up valuable ground for dialogue, and providing insights into the effects of globalisation, ecofeminist analyses are limited in their ability to address the underlying causes and major driving forces of globalisation. This is because ecofeminism insists on the primacy of gender as the determinant of social organisation, attempts to separate women from 'culture', and identifies patriarchy as the defining characteristic of capitalism. This paper will outline the ecofeminist critique and what it has to offer before presenting a more compelling view of the defining characteristics of capitalism.

### **(Re)weaving an ecofeminist world-view**

Ecofeminism is premised upon the social critique that the domination of women through patriarchy and the domination of nature through the Western model of development, are intrinsically linked. "The rape of the earth, in all its forms, becomes a metaphor for the rape of woman, in all its many guises."<sup>i</sup> Therefore the ecological crisis and the subjugation of women are two symptoms of the same illness. Globalisation is of particular concern to ecofeminists as it is an extension of the capitalist project which further consolidates the power of transnational companies (TNCs) and more deeply entrenches the socio-economic institutions that enforce the domination over women and nature. This paper will focus on a material (or socialist) ecofeminist analysis due to its ability to critique capitalism, yet a wider understanding of ecofeminism as a movement will also be used to further illuminate the ecofeminist position on globalisation.

Ecofeminism developed as a theory and an activist position in response to the feminist, ecological and peace movements and as recognition of the strength of female participation in grassroots activism. The term ecofeminism was first coined in 1974 by Francoise d'Eaubonne when she 'called for a feminist revolution to ensure ecological survival',<sup>ii</sup> but since the mid-seventies there has been a rush of publications, conferences, organisations, actions and celebrations, recognising and exploring connections between women, nature and social change.<sup>iii</sup> Like feminism, however, ecofeminism is an umbrella term entailing positions and standpoints as diverse as Goddess-worship, lesbian separatism, Christian ecofeminism and socialist ecofeminism. This diversity is not a contradiction but at the very heart of the theory and practice of ecofeminism.

Common to all ecofeminists, however, is that they identify the failure of the feminist movement and the ecological movement to make significant headway as a failure to

recognise the common cause of both problems. There is a systematic domination, they claim, over both women and nature, underpinned by a conceptual set of dualisms. These dualisms would be familiar as man/woman, mind/body, reason/emotion, human/nature, active/passive, and so forth. The importance lies, however, not just in the presumption that reality does in fact occur in binary opposite sets, but that the former in each pair is believed to be justifiably superior to the latter. It is important to note that both 'woman' and 'nature' fall on the same side in the dualism sets; defined as that which is not 'man' or 'human'. In this system women and nature are subordinated as 'other', and are 'legitimately' treated as such.<sup>iv</sup>

As both forms of domination and all others that conform to this pattern are bound by the same conceptual logic, each must be addressed in order to address the others. Therefore, the ecological crises cannot be challenged without challenging patriarchy and vice versa. In this way ecofeminism offers a critique of mainstream social movements. Ecofeminism insists on breaking apart these dualisms to (re)create a society of reciprocity and mutuality without hierarchy or domination. For this reason all systems of domination, including racism, classism, and heterosexism amongst others must also be overcome as they stem from the same logic of domination.<sup>v</sup>

As dualism and value hierarchy are to be overcome, diversity is necessarily valued, as no one voice or group of voices will be able to say who or what has the most value. This idea is affirmed by ecology that shows that diversity and mutuality and reciprocity are beneficial for the survival of the whole.<sup>vi</sup> This valuing of the importance of difference - 'truth' is contextual and plural - is argued to avoid the postmodern trap of 'relativism' where truth dissolves into nothing.<sup>vii</sup> Ecofeminists speak of reality being like a patchwork quilt, for example, in which there are boundaries, but no absolute story within. Simple patterns and mosaics of pieces that individuals and groups have contributed will form the interior. These boundaries are defined by the lack of domination, contextualism, pluralism, diversity, the championing of marginalised voices (eg. the experiences of women), and an emphasis on understanding oneself in relationship to others.<sup>viii</sup>

This last comment is most important to ecofeminism. What is meant by 'self in relationship to others' is that we must recognise the integrity of our own personal centre, ie. our own body and consciousness, and in doing so we can recognise and value that of others. Furthermore, just as we can understand and learn about ourselves and who we are through our relationships with other people (family, friends, loved ones, colleges, even enemies) so too we can understand that we are also in relationships with the natural world and those things it entails. We can learn about ourselves through our interactions and relationships with those entities, both living and non-living, and their relationships with each other as well. In this way an ecofeminist image of nature is also an image of society, as the two are intrinsically linked.<sup>ix</sup> In contrast to deep ecology, the two are defined by ecofeminists as separate entities, but they are also symbiotic. Nevertheless, nature's autonomy is recognised.<sup>x</sup>

Ecofeminist spirituality or theology is in itself a very diverse affair, drawing from many diverse traditions, including ancient European, Asian and African

mythologies, from Native American belief, from neo-pagan Wiccan belief, from Christianity and other established religious traditions.<sup>xi</sup> Nevertheless, across the diversity that ecofeminism supports there seems to be a common assertion of women's spirituality as a primary good, having its own inherent nature and integrity, and being fundamentally grounded in nature itself.

### **An embodied materialism**

Although materialist ecofeminism (sometimes called socialist ecofeminism) developed in part as a critique of spiritual ecofeminism, a materialist analysis always has a fluid relationship to a spiritual or ethical analysis, and the boundary between the two isn't firm. Yet, for materialist ecofeminists, the breaking apart of duality is only the first stage in liberation. Spiritual ecofeminists tend to simply turn the conceptual duality on its head to illustrate that the female connection to nature is in fact a source of power and strength rather than a justification for subordination and exploitation. Therein lies a tendency for women to claim to be "closer to nature" and therefore that they should be the ecological and social leaders for humanity. This opens ground for charges of essentialism to enter.<sup>xii</sup>

Further still, many women are concerned that the emphasis spiritual ecofeminism places on an ethic for change ignores the effects and power of capitalism in shaping the lives of women and shaping the globe. Without this dimension, it is argued that solutions for change remain too rooted in self-realisation and individual and community change and prevent ecofeminism from coming to terms with the socioeconomic relationships between North and South or internal national ethnic relations.<sup>xiii</sup> White middle class ecofeminists fail to realise that the affluence and lifestyle choices they are embracing have been afforded to them through the continued exploitation of the 'sisters' in the South. Their (re)discovery is being sourced through appropriating the knowledge and experiences of women still treated as 'Other'. Indigenous women, African-American women and women from the South, it is argued, are still excluded, by material economic forces, from any 're-weaving' that is occurring.

Materialist ecofeminists have attempted to shift the emphasis of analysis from 'naturalising' differences to analysing the material forces that shape the relations between men, women and nature, in an attempt to sidestep the problems of essentialism and exclusion.

For materialist ecofeminists the locus of domination lives in patriarchal capitalism. This is the social-economic system that has crystallised the centuries of thought, ideology and tradition<sup>xiv</sup> that have created dualisms and used them to systematically exploit women and nature by a single logic. Many ecofeminists premise their material analysis on the dichotomy of production and reproduction. Due to the necessary exclusion of women's reproductive labour from the formal economy, most women already live in an 'alternative reality' and have a different relationship with nature to men. The female social experience is one in which time is not commodified

as it is for males, because their work is a 24 hour experience filled with life affirming and organic practices such as child raising, caring, creating home and community. This allows women the privilege of *embodying* the aspects of culture that are still firmly rooted in nature. Therefore women are uniquely qualified as the historical agents who can liberate human kind and the natural world from immanent crises.<sup>xv</sup>

### **Effects of Globalisation**

For materialist ecofeminists globalisation is an extension or outgrowth of patriarchal capitalism. Few ecofeminists have explored the problem of globalisation head on, challenging the thesis or rhetoric of its proponents, but many do explicate its real effects in the world, and on women. Examples abound of women fighting patriarchal capitalism and globalisation in grassroots women's organisations.

Ecofeminists are concerned about globalisation because it represents the consolidation and concentrating of the power of patriarchal capitalism. They explore the impacts of globalisation in a number of ways: the changing concepts of state, the neo-colonisation of patriarchal capitalism, globalisation as damaging diversity, and the feminisation of poverty.

### **The changing nation state**

Central to globalisation is the changing role of the nation state. According to globalisation theorists, the nation state as we know it will shrink in size and power until the state apparatus only exists to control the 'rump functions' such as the police and taxes etc. The state, as the primary mode of social organisation will be superseded by the market. The freedom of trade, information and cultural flows will create a "global village" in which individuals are global citizens rather than nationals. Or so there story goes...

As many theorists have noted, it is important to untangle the rhetoric concerning globalisation from the real changes that are occurring internationally. Although, multinationals are becoming increasingly powerful and the role of the nation state is changing we must remember that globalisation is a contested concept.

For ecofeminism the changing role of the nation state has a variety of significances. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly is that the state is argued to intrinsically be an institution of patriarchal capitalism. That is that historically the state was created as an institution in aid of the market and capital as an institution of control. '[T]he economy cannot directly control women's sexuality, fertility and work capacity; to do this, the state, with its family policy, is necessary.'<sup>xvi</sup> The 'housewifization' of women, or the split between production and reproduction, was a requirement of capitalism and the state helped create this condition. As a diverse array of feminists have discussed, women were relegated to the private sphere and therefore denied equal access to participate in 'civil society'.<sup>xvii</sup> The continuing importance of

public/private dichotomy is highlighted in the battles of the suffragette movement and the limitations of liberal feminism.<sup>xviii</sup>

In the South the State as a mode of social organisation has an even shorter history than in the North. Vandana Shiva explores the changing concepts of State in India as an example of the impacts of Statism, capitalism and globalisation on subsistence communities in the South. Shiva states that the concept of 'motherland' - rooted in the soil as an image of sacred life and creation, the feminine - was the traditional organising metaphor in India. It was replaced by 'Mother India' as a focus of resistance in the fight against colonisation by Britain in the 1940's. The subsequent drive for 'development' replaced the image of mother or feminine strength with the state itself as a patriarchal leader.<sup>xix</sup>

Yet the role of the state itself is changing. Shiva claims that at the economic level, in India, 'the state has been totally subjugated to the superstate run by the transnational corporations (TNC's) and the Bretton Woods institutions - World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)'.<sup>xx</sup> These institutions, she argues, are integrating India into a globalising world economy at a great cost as people are forcibly removed from sacred soil, and female images of diversity are subsumed by the homogeneity and hegemony of a patriarchal capitalist market.<sup>xxi</sup>

Again the state is explicated as an institution of patriarchal capitalism through its complicity in globalisation in the guise of national interest. 'When public interest is divorced from national interest, and national interest is predicated on international interests, then sovereignty is in crisis, along with democracy.'<sup>xxii</sup> Shiva has great concern over the anger and violence that remains in the wake of national disintegration, loss of identity and self-determination through globalisation. She identifies the rise of nationalism and internal ethnic conflict as a symptom of the dislocation of globalisation, but challenges any idea that the creation of new nation states will cure the illness.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Mary Mies also explores the link between the nation-state and the creation of globalisation giving a Northern perspective. Mies utilises Wallenstein's dependency theory to illustrate that the global orientation of capital and national self-interest are not in fact in contradiction to each other but 'a precondition for both the nation-state and the market economy or capitalism.'<sup>xxiv</sup> Capitalism requires both internal and external colonies to function, therefore in the guise of 'free' trade and reciprocity globalisation becomes the systematic use of the existing unequal global distribution of wealth and power to further entrench relationships of dependency and exploitation. Northern states are fostering the processes of globalisation in their own self interest, rather than their own dismantlement for a 'global village'.<sup>xxv</sup>

Ecofeminists are critical of both the institution of the state and its role in globalisation due to its function in a patriarchal economy. As the state is so significantly tied to identity and political participation the changing nation state, never a holistic institution to begin with, has been important in the rise of nationalist disintegration and violence. Ultimately, however, ecofeminists are ambivalent about

the future of nation-state, advocating new (or old) concepts of sovereignty, in which people are economically, socially and spiritually embedded in the land that they live on, and therefore in nature.<sup>xxvi</sup>

## Neo-colonisation

Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies place great emphasis of the role of expanding international capitalism into the South and its interaction with subsistence modes of living. The expansion and neo-colonisation of capitalism into, over and onto other cultural/economic systems adds an important facet to ecofeminist discussion.

For Shiva examining patriarchal capitalism is illuminating as “contemporary development activity in the Third World super-imposes the scientific and economic paradigms created by western, gender-based ideology on communities in other cultures.”<sup>xxvii</sup> The interaction between subsistence worldviews and institutions with capitalist ones illustrates the domination of both women and nature claimed to be inherent in the capitalist system.

In subsistence economies the knowledge of women is highly valued and respected. The 'feminine' is part of a web of belief that includes the immanent life-force of mother earth or 'Prakriti' as it is called in India, but it is also reiterated in the socioeconomic position of women as providers of food and as mothers. In India, the spiritual dimension to the subsistence worldview is embedded in the material conditions of life.<sup>xxviii</sup> A “divorce of the spiritual and the material is incomprehensible to them”.<sup>xxix</sup> Due to their direct interaction with nature for day to day survival in a subsistence mode women, as well as men, are very much materially embedded in nature. The split that materially and discursively characterises Western societies is unknown.<sup>xxx</sup>

However, many traditionally subsistence-based communities have lost power and control over their lands and their practices, including women's knowledge and farming capacities, due to their interaction with capitalist economics and the dominant Western worldview. Ecofeminists argue that women, and children, are hurt most severely by this process, as women receive no equivalent position of power or self-determination in a patriarchal capitalist economy to what they had in a subsistence economy. Decision making power, cash payments and status are conferred to men in changing community structures, marginalising women.<sup>xxxi</sup> Furthermore, the environmental degradation caused by fast tracked 'development' and the removal of the ability of women to utilise their traditional knowledge in these new Westernised systems are argued to be intractably linked.

Shiva's famous example is of the Green Revolution. She argues that the Green Revolution did not feed the hungry but perpetuated hunger through technological systems that took control out of the hands of traditional female farmers and placed it in the hands of multinationals through technological and hence economic dependence. The removal of local knowledge from decision making and the abstracted and reductionist qualities of Western science and the limited goals of the



development paradigm created environmental degradation through poor land use, pest control toxic chemical use, as well as social dislocation of local residents. Shiva concludes that the devaluation of women in their political economic capacity and the devaluation of the soil as sacred and immanent are part of the same machination.<sup>xxxii</sup> Globalisation requires the integration of local and subsistence based economies into a global market subsuming 'local' interest to a 'global' interest which is clearly specific interest and not a universal one at all.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### **Damaging diversity**

As an environmental ethic, spiritual ecofeminism is in a position to explore why capitalism and globalisation are wrong morally. In particular it offers a critique of commodification in terms of loss of diversity, where diversity is a moral value. It provides a criticism of capitalism's ideology of competition as rhetoric in a world in which monopoly and oligopoly are norms.

For spiritual ecofeminists, globalisation becomes particularly problematic due to its homogenising effect on culture and nature through commodification and market mechanisms. Sometimes described as the "McDonaldisation" of culture, globalisation has been widely criticised for acting as a blanket culture that smothers out difference and diversity in a sea of homogeneity and sameness.<sup>xxxiv</sup> And so we see "universal" fast food chains and beverages, and access to American television in countries where people starve.

Diversity is at the heart of an ecofeminist ethic and integral to ecological and spiritual health. Furthermore, the commodification of culture and resources to integrate it into the global marketplace, overrides other social values leaving economic value as the 'global' value.<sup>xxxv</sup> Commodification does not honour an ethic of 'the sacred' which is central to an ecofeminist theology of the immanent divine. Furthermore, the atomisation and reification of commodity does not respect the integrity of the webs of relationship in life and culture.

### **The feminisation of poverty**

Women today comprise the majority of the poor both in the North and in the South. Mary Mellor explores at length the impact that globalising capital is having on the world's poor, and in particular, its women. The pressures of poverty make the exploitation of women and nature as cheap and disposable resources easy to achieve and highly visible. Mellor considers prostitution tourism and sweat-shop labour examples of patriarchal capitalism resourcing women as 'the ultimate cash crop' in the drive towards globalisation.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Prostitution has become a primary tourist attraction in South East Asia, with child prostitution and slavery also quite common. Yet the human rights and dignity that both poverty and prostitution steal are hidden behind masks. 'By locating prostitution in the culture of poverty and the exotic, the question of human dignity becomes obscured and neutralised while Thai women become qualified as 'new pasture' in which local entrepreneurs can invest and make profits, and over which

rich clients can exercise their sexual fantasies without guilt.<sup>xxxvii</sup> The inequalities that have been created by capitalism are then exploited through the marketing and even active encouragement of prostitution as a tourist attraction in order for poor nations such as Thailand to keep a desperate toehold in the world economy. Mellor qualifies this, noting that 'red-light' districts are also prevalent in the North where sex exploitation of women is also commonplace.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Similarly, women are resourced by the imperatives of global capital to slave as outworkers and in sweatshops creating garments largely for sale in the affluent North. These women are mostly young and are valued for their 'nimble fingers' and docility. This behaviour is often derived from the desperation of poverty and the high exposure of the populations of poor nations to a military presence. This employment is paid pitifully if at all and conducted in poor conditions.<sup>xxxix</sup> Like prostitution, sweat-shop labour represents a net transfer of wealth both in commodities and capital from the South to the North.<sup>xl</sup>

Yet even in the wealthy nations of the North, poverty is increasingly feminised. The work the women fill is largely part-time or casual, with little status, low pay and little security. This is compounded by the stigma associated with domestic labour and motherhood, leaving women with welfare 'handouts' due to the non-valuation of the daily labour.<sup>xli</sup> '[M]en do one-third of the world's work for 95 per cent of its income, and own more than 99% of its assets.'<sup>xlii</sup> Ecofeminists take these trends as evidence of the patriarchal nature of capitalism. For ecofeminists globalisation is being created at the cost of women's welfare.

## **Causes**

Ariel Salleh is one of the few ecofeminists to explicitly attribute the effects of patriarchal capitalism and globalisation to causes stemming from gender differences. At the core of Salleh's material analysis of patriarchal capitalism is the gendered division of society as the predeterminant for the construction of duality in Western thought. Since ancient times the meaning of biological difference has been circumscribed by psychosexual assumptions and discursive constructions.<sup>xliii</sup>

Salleh claims that neither biology nor sexuality is polar, but a continuum of experiences so the categories of Man and Woman are artificial or at least overly simplistic. As the reproductive power of women could not be rivalled by men, it had to thus be controlled and so children 'owned' by men.<sup>xliv</sup> "Ecofeminists conjecture that the identification of 'production' with 'masculinity' may arise because at some deep unconscious level men are mystified and alienated by women's unique potency in species reproduction."<sup>xlv</sup> Therefore it is the psychosexual domination of men over women that has lead to the valuation of masculine labour in the capitalist market as production, and the non-valuation of female child rearing and domestic labour as reproductive.

This has real consequences in the world that can be analysed without reference to essential biological natures. It has placed woman as a mediator between man and nature. "Women's traditional positioning between men and nature is a primary contradiction of capitalism, and may well be the deepest, most fundamental contradiction of all. In anthropological terms - shaped by androcentric interests - women's bodies are treated first as if they were a 'natural resource', the uterus as organ of birthing labour bring the material origin of 'formal labour' as such."<sup>xlvi</sup>

The deepest contradiction, for Salleh, in capitalism is not the ownership of the means of production that is identified by Marxism, but the psychosexual domination of men over women and therefore over nature. That is the treatment of both women and nature as resources, and limitless commons to be exploited and as sources of externalities to be poisoned and discarded.<sup>xlvi</sup>

According to Salleh, and also Mary Mellor, the psychosexual schism between men and women has come to inform the division of labour that is a precondition for capitalism. Capitalism is essentially patriarchal, according to ecofeminists, as it requires the duality of production/reproduction to function.<sup>xlvi</sup> Production has become defined as the labour, that is done primarily by men, in creating commodities for the capitalist market. This is opposed to the unpaid and 'invisible' work done primarily by women in child rearing, domestic, caring and volunteer capacities. This caring and domestic work is the auxiliary work that facilitates the operation of a capitalist economy. It provides emotional and structural support to allow a wage earner to perform their role.<sup>xlix</sup> "The basic character of this female exploitation remains unchanged by globalisation and the workplace restructuring that comes with it."<sup>i</sup>

### **Limitations of Ecofeminism**

Ecofeminism offers a useful theoretical framework to critique capitalism and globalisation but by no means the only framework that enables this to be done. Other theoretical frameworks such as Marxism, deep ecology, social ecology and inclusive democracy<sup>ii</sup> also enable people to critique capitalism and come up with analyses of its impacts that cover some of the same impacts as well as others not covered by ecofeminists. For example similar analyses of the impacts of neo-colonialism have been made by non-ecofeminists and the feminist angle is not that compelling since the Green Revolution did not discriminate between male and female traditional farmers.

Ecofeminists also claim to be able to offer a new system of values that makes them uniquely able to challenge patriarchal capitalist values. For example Mellor states: "Any interaction with the market must operate within its assumption that the only measure of value is price, and the only motivation for economic activity is profit. A feminist green socialism would challenge that proposition; it would show that some things are beyond price."<sup>iii</sup> But others have also challenged that position.<sup>liii</sup>

Whilst materialist ecofeminists offer scathing appraisals of capitalism they do not directly attack the institution of the market economy. It is often left unclear in their analyses how the market economy should be dealt with. In contrast the Inclusive Democracy project, which also challenges capitalism and its associated modes of domination, including sexism and naturism, stresses the role of the market economy and the ideology of growth.

[The] concentration of economic power and ecological destruction are shown as inevitable consequences, as well as fundamental preconditions, of economic growth [in capitalist growth economies]... The crucial issue today is how we create a new society where the institutionalized domination of human being over human being and the subsequent idea of dominating nature is ruled out. The search for such a system will lead us to the conclusion that it is not just growth ideology which has to be abandoned but the market economy itself.<sup>liv</sup>

Without directly addressing the problem of the market economy ecofeminism leaves itself vulnerable to the charge of being reformist. Capitalist imperatives, realised in the market economy, are subsumed in ecofeminism by a preoccupation with gender relations.

### Capitalist Imperatives

Ecofeminist critiques of globalism are weakest where they seek to explain the causes of globalisation in terms of feminist analyses. The domination of women by men has occurred in many pre-capitalist societies but this domination and the dualities associated with it were not sufficient to create the sort of capitalist culture that seeks to expand its economic power globally.

The rise of modern capitalism from feudal societies has been more convincingly described by others. Max Weber's explanation places emphasis on ideas and the role of religion. Weber described how work became a religious calling, a way of worshipping God.<sup>lv</sup> The idea of the moral value of work spread through Europe and to English Protestants. The English Puritans in particular, embraced the gospel of work.<sup>lvi</sup> The work ethic helped to supply the new entrepreneurs with "sober, conscientious, and unusually industrious workmen, who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by God."<sup>lvii</sup> From England, the Puritans took this idea of work as a calling to America where, as in England, preachers made it a topic of sermons.

Following the Protestant Reformation the acquisition of wealth became an approved and worthy goal, perhaps for the first time in history, and this was a major factor in the rise of capitalism in Western society. R. H. Tawney states in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* that the significance of Calvinism consisted:

in its admission to a new position of respectability of a powerful and growing body of social interests, which, however irrepressible in practice,

had hitherto been regarded by religious theory as, at best, of dubious propriety, and at worst, as frankly immoral.<sup>lviii</sup>

The Reformation provided moral support and legitimacy to a class of people who had an interest in raising the status and influence of commerce and industry. Protestantism provided a conducive environment for capitalism to flourish in and the moral high ground from which to pursue profit freely and with good conscience. Similarly the new businessmen supported a church and faith that told them that what they wanted to do was in keeping with what God wanted them to do.

The shrewd, calculating commercialism which tries all human relations by pecuniary standards, the acquisitiveness which cannot rest while there are competitors to be conquered or profits to be won, the love of social power and hunger for economic gain—these irrepressible appetites have evoked from time immemorial the warnings and denunciations of saints and sages. Plunged in the cleansing waters of later Puritanism, the qualities which less enlightened ages had denounced as social vices emerged as economic virtues.<sup>lix</sup>

In England, Holland, Scotland, Geneva and America the combination of Protestantism and capitalism wrought social change of huge dimensions. In England it overturned the power of a feudal aristocracy “contemptuous of the economic virtues... more interested in maintaining customary standards of consumption than in accumulating capital for future production”.<sup>lx</sup>

Once the capitalist spirit took hold it was hard to resist or turn back. When businesspeople became capitalists, those in the same business either had to follow suit and give up their leisurely and relaxed way of doing business, or go out of business because they couldn't compete with the ever expanding capitalist entrepreneurs.<sup>lxi</sup> The religious roots of the spirit of capitalism “died out slowly, giving way to a utilitarian worldliness.”<sup>lxii</sup>

With the rise of capitalism work came to be valued according to its productivity and wealth creating potential. Success in business was measured solely in terms of profits. Wealth, as the supposed fruits of hard work, became an indicator of a person's worth and determined their social standing. The emphasis on work as a religious calling was gradually superseded by a materialistic quest for social mobility and material success.<sup>lxiii</sup>

As wealth came to symbolise the fruits of hard work, those who were wealthy gained status. They wielded power over others through being able to hire them or otherwise pay for their services and favours. And as wealth became a measure of worthiness and success, money became an even more effective means of inducement to manipulate and sway others.<sup>lxiv</sup> Since the late nineteenth century business leaders have used their status, their control over employees, and their command over financial resources to make their influence felt in all realms of society, to exercise power and control over others, both men and women.

Globalisation is a natural extension to the wealth and power acquiring tendencies of capitalism. The trend towards the concentration of economic power began in the US at the end of the nineteenth century when a wave of mergers of businesses created several very large corporations. Between 1898 and 1902 over 2,600 firms went out of existence as the result of mergers.<sup>lxv</sup> By the end of the 1920s giant corporations, run by professional managers, had come to dominate most US industries, and with this economic life in general.<sup>lxvi</sup>

A major purpose for these mergers was to overcome the uncertainty created by competition and so have more control over markets and therefore prices and sales.<sup>lxvii</sup> This quest for control by avoiding competition led to the creation of trusts and holding companies to enable former competitors to combine. These trusts expanded horizontally to reduce direct competition but also vertically so that they could control their own supply of raw materials and the marketing of their final products. They also expanded into foreign markets. In the US this trend preceded a similar trend in other countries.<sup>lxviii</sup>

In the last few decades the mergers of companies have taken place on a global scale. The economic muscle of transnational corporations is now formidable.<sup>lxix</sup> Transnational companies account for most of the world's financial transactions and about 70% of the world's trade. The current trend towards large corporate mergers is likely to see corporations gaining considerably in economic power, compared to nation states. Whilst average world economic growth is around 2 to 3 percent per year, the largest transnational corporations are growing by 8 to 10 percent per year.<sup>lxx</sup>

The new super-sized entities are not only able to control markets, prices and sales but also to rival the economic power of nation states and win freedom from the power of national governments to regulate their activities. The corporate push for free trade in particular, in the name of competition, has all the appearances of a push for corporate power over the nation state.

Globalisation clearly follows from the imperatives of capitalism. But the question we are addressing in this article is whether it is, as ecofeminists claim, the patriarchal nature of capitalism that provides its driving force and defines its essential nature? An alternative, and more conventional explanation, is that commerce and profit-making, when they are raised above all other human activity, result in the domination of all aspects of humanity and nature, so that all is subsumed in the drive for profits and economic growth.

## **Production vs Reproduction**

Salleh seeks to explain capitalism in terms of the dichotomy between the productive sphere of men and the reproductive sphere of women, rather than the more conventional explanation of a dichotomy between capital and labour. Salleh's difficulty is that it is not so easy to pigeon-hole women into the reproductive sphere. Early capitalism depended on women and children as workers--productive units--

and power was exercised over them through economic and religious domination. And this form of domination was far more central to capitalism than the domination of men over their wives, or production over reproduction.

Getting skilled workmen to submit to factory discipline was particularly difficult and manufacturers looked for mechanical ways of replacing their labour so that most factory tasks could be reduced “to the exercise of vigilance and dexterity, - faculties.... speedily brought to perfection in the young”.<sup>lxxi</sup> Women and children were favoured for such work because “their slender and more pliant fingers were better adapted to the tasks required of them; their shorter stature made it possible to place them in corners, and underneath machines”<sup>lxxii</sup> Also children and young women were considered to be more “timid and easier to rule”.<sup>lxxiii</sup> However, with time men too became submissive in their work roles. Industrialisation depended on “a process of socialisation which aimed at stabilizing and inculcating fidelity among those whose labor was being conscripted.”<sup>lxxiv</sup>

This was achieved, in many cases through religion which taught a work ethic. The ideal solution was a workforce that was motivated to work for work's sake. Many factory owners, despairing of the traditional lackadaisical attitudes of their workers “launched ‘moral crusades’ and attempted to convert whole sections of their labour force” to Protestantism in the hope of creating “an efficient, diligent, and reliable” workforce.<sup>lxxv</sup>

For many such factory owners, the new evangelical branches of Protestantism such as Methodism seemed to serve the purpose well. Methodists tended to have ‘methodical’ habits, to pay careful attention to instructions, to fulfil contracts on time, and not be inclined to embezzle materials.<sup>lxxvi</sup> They were imbued with a work ethic and were generally sober, hard working, obedient employees. The following directive was issued at the Methodist Conference in 1766: “We must never forget the first rule, ‘Be diligent. Never be unemployed for a moment. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time; neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.”<sup>lxxvii</sup>

Methodist preachers taught their followers to submit to authority and be obedient: “Even if those in authority are evil or without faith, nevertheless the authority and its power is good and from God...”<sup>lxxviii</sup> Elie Halévy noted that Methodist leaders had declared their intention of “promoting loyalty in the middle ranks as well as subordination and industry in the lower orders of society”.<sup>lxxix</sup>

Thompson argued that workers accepted Methodism in part because they were indoctrinated. The Methodist Sunday schools were very active and often the only source of ‘education’ for poor children. These schools were more concerned with teaching good behaviour and submission than teaching reading and writing. In fact, Methodist Sunday schools, like Anglican Sunday schools, discouraged the teaching of writing. Methodists believed children were naturally sinful and education tended to be aimed at their moral rescue. They were not allowed to play freely; their play had to be channelled into useful activities such as chopping wood and digging:<sup>lxxx</sup>

Break their will betimes. Begin this work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, perhaps before they can speak at all. Whatever pain it costs, break the will if you would not damn the child. Let a child from a year old be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly; from that age make him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it... Break his will now, and his soul shall live, and he will probably bless you to all eternity.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

This domination and socialisation of children so that they would grow up to be subservient adults had little to do with the dichotomy between production and reproduction. The domination of women was only one of the forms of domination that occurred in early capitalist societies.

When religion had run its course the work ethic continued as a motivator, reinforced through propaganda, socialisation at home and school, and popular culture. The active stigmatisation of unemployed and poor people as being to blame for their fate also contributed to the reinforcement of the work ethic.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

The irony is that having made productive work the centre of life, both material and spiritual, capitalism then proceeded to destroy work as a satisfying, meaningful activity for millions of people by fragmenting it and reducing some jobs to activities that were better suited for animals or machines to do. Unable to rely on a work ethic to motivate manual workers in such jobs, employers have used the services of engineers, psychologists, sociologists and others to find ways to increase productivity and motivate workers.

Frederick Winslow Taylor's Scientific Management was one such method. Taylor sought to separate the thinking part of the work from the physical part of the work and give it to managers who would then tell the workers exactly what to do and how to do it. Taylor's views of workers were not particularly enlightened: "Now one of the very first requirements for a man who is fit to handle pig iron as a regular occupation is that he shall be so stupid and so phlegmatic that he more nearly resembles in his mental make-up the ox than any other type."<sup>lxxxiii</sup> It was Taylor's separation of mental and manual labour that became characteristic of mass production methods in the twentieth century.

Whilst both women and men work and are therefore part of the production apparatus of capitalist society it is difficult to agree with Salleh that the female social experience is one in which time is not commodified but filled with life affirming and organic practices such as child raising, caring, creating home and community. Salleh also argues that due to the necessary exclusion of women's reproductive labour from the formal economy, women experience a different reality. However reproduction is increasingly being incorporated, through new technologies, into the capitalist realm of production.<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Her conclusion that our different life experience allows women the privilege of *embodying* the aspects of culture that are still firmly rooted in nature is therefore somewhat debateable.



Mellor recognises that women have now become highly integrated into the workforce rather than simply being housewives, yet suggests that women workers still display an 'immediate altruism' or sense of duty for domestic caring work in addition to their waged labour, when many men may not. Mellor has reservations over giving a biological explanation to this phenomenon, but is uncertain of an alternative.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Her implication is that women are more altruistic because of their upbringing or life experience as mothers. Yet this unproven tendency in women, or its lack in men, hardly qualifies as a major social determinant of globalisation.

## Ruling Elites

Ecofeminists also point to the predominance of men in the ruling elites and capitalist ranks as significant. But gender is only one of the criteria for success in a capitalist society and an increasingly less important one. Ralph Miliband noted in his book *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* that:

there is a high degree of homogeneity among the members of the dominant class, much of it based on a marked similarity of social background, education, and 'life-styles'. A majority are of middle- and upper-class origin, and have had a public-school and Oxford or Cambridge education. Many of them are linked by ties of kinship.... They constantly cross each other's paths in an incessant round of meetings, lunches, dinners, functions, and ceremonies, and as members of boards, commissions, councils, committees, and institutions of the most varied kind.<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

Miliband noted that these people shared similar ideologies and political views and that those who joined the power elite from outside soon learned to take on the values and behaviour of the elite, as an essential requirement of success.<sup>lxxxvii</sup>

The alternative route to wealth, by rising up the corporate hierarchy, is just as restricted. The hierarchical structure of business organisations mirrors the class structure of the society they are in. In Britain, those at the top of the organisational hierarchy tend to be those of higher class. Because of their education and upbringing they fit in with the company power brokers better: for a man to be promoted to the top ranks of a company "he must be like those who are already in, and upon whose judgements his own success rests... To be compatible with the top men is to act like them, to look like them, to think like them" or at least to give that impression. Upper class men possess a 'cultural capital', which includes a manner and style and way of speaking, that enables them to fit in with ease and tends to give them authority with subordinates, a quality expected of senior executives.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

Similarly, in the US, when Mills studied the top chief executives of the largest companies in each generation from 1900 to the 1950s, he found that they too were "a quite uniform social type which has had exceptional advantages of origin and training". They were mainly American-born of American-born fathers, college-educated, Protestant, white, and from upper or upper-middle class families. Seven

out of ten had fathers who were businessmen or professionals. And the proportion coming from working class families was falling over time with only 2.5 percent of chief executives under 50 in 1952 coming from such families.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

There is no doubt that sexism exists in capitalist societies and plays a role in preventing women from reaching the top positions in corporations. But class, race, ethnicity and sexual preferences can also limit one's chances. Are these prejudices even necessary to capitalism as ecofeminists argue?

The work ethic provides the legitimation and justification for inequalities in our society because it teaches us that those who have the wealth deserve to and those that are poor have themselves to blame. It also provides a mythical means by which individuals can climb to the top through talent, perseverance and hard work. In many ways sexism and other 'isms' provide obvious counters to this myth-making and it is in the interests of an all encompassing capitalism to break them down, which is slowly happening. But although more women and homosexuals and blacks and non-Christians are seeping into the ranks of the elites, the values of those elites remain unchanged. Women who do become top executives do so by accepting corporate values and excelling at them. They take on the corporate culture; become thoroughly integrated into the capitalist culture.

Is the problem that the top ranks of corporate executives and owners are singularly unrepresentative of the broader population, or does the problem lie more deeply within a capitalist culture that prioritises profits over other human values, including environmental protection. Would a more representative corporate elite behave any differently?

## **Capitalist Culture**

Salleh claims the project of ecofeminism is to use the experience of women to pull men out of patriarchal capitalism, rather than integrate women into it. She points out that a system of domination, such as patriarchal capitalism, hurts men just as it hurts women, leaving them fundamentally unhappy. But Salleh argues that women have a freedom from that system that men do not have because they do not receive the ego gratification that men do from the system.<sup>xc</sup>

But is this true? Western women are deeply embedded in most aspects of capitalist culture, and even women who are not corporate executives receive some measure of ego gratification from it. Women living in affluent countries are not separated from capitalist culture any more than men, despite their reproductive capacity and cycles. Perhaps this is most evidenced in their acceptance of consumerism and the work ethic whatever their roles, as mothers or workers.

Capitalist culture depends not only on the capitalists at the top but also a degree of acceptance by the wider society that capitalist culture delivers a quality life to everyone who deserves it. Gramsci used the term 'hegemony' to describe the

phenomenon by which the majority of people accept the values and political axioms that ensure their own subordination to the ruling elite. Earl Shorris, in his book *The Oppressed Middle*, discusses how:

The most insidious of the many kinds of power is the power to define happiness. It is the dream of merchants, despots, managers, and philosophers, because whoever defines happiness can control the organization and the actions of other men: he not only assigns aspirations and desires, he constructs the system of morals by which the means of achieving happiness is judged.<sup>xcii</sup>

A merchant in an affluent society defines happiness in ways that encourage acquisitiveness, wastefulness “and social competition through displays of material wealth”.<sup>xcii</sup> In such a society, many people participate in this definition of happiness so that they can sell their own services and goods. Managers “prove the system” by enjoying “more of the signs of happiness” than those beneath them and by the status and power they have over their subordinates. Each step up the social hierarchy offers the aspirant a small reward in terms of status, power and income, a proof of the eventual happiness in store for those who keep climbing.<sup>xciii</sup>

In order to sell its products, capitalists feed on profitable aspects of patriarchal domination. Capitalist commodities such as women's magazines, to use a very crude example, are socialising agents of women. The underlying drive of these magazines is consumerism - they tap into patriarchal behaviour as a selling point. Beauty is narrowly defined and fetishised in order to sell products, and the early sexualisation of girls is promoted to expand markets, both in readership and products.<sup>xciv</sup> But is it the relationship between men and women that creates a capitalism that exploits women or, as seems more likely, is capitalism simply using patriarchal values to its own advantage?

The degree to which women have internalised consumerism cannot be downplayed or dismissed. Although consumerism is addressed by ecofeminists as a problem for women of the North created by patriarchal capitalism, they do not adequately take account of power of consumerism to acculturate women and shape individual self-actualisation. Although ecofeminists maintain that it is the social experience of women participating in community outside commodified time and necessity in the realm of reproduction that allows them to experience or ‘know’ an embeddedness in nature, is it possible to conjecture that this removes women from their lifetime of culture and socialisation to the contrary? Certainly not in the North. In the South, as Shiva and Mies note, people have the raw experience of capitalism subsuming their traditional ways of life and worldviews but this is true of both men and women.

By effectively removing women from ‘Culture’, that is the acculturation and socialisation processes entailed in the work ethic, and corporate and consumers cultures, materialist ecofeminists actually fail to break apart the dualism of Culture/Nature. The implication that men are subject to culture and women aren’t is a form of essentialism, the very problem a material ecofeminism attempts to address.

## **Conclusion**

Ecofeminism has strengths in its ability to highlight the impacts of globalisation and their significance, particularly with respect to its impacts on women and children and on cultural and biological diversity. However its weakness is in analysing the causes of globalisation and this is because of its focus on only one of the characteristics of capitalism, and perhaps one of the less important when it comes to the capitalist drive to globalism.

Another problem with ecofeminism is its tendency to alienate men. Men are also exploited and damaged under capitalism. Even when ecofeminists address essentialism that may linger in their dialogue, so that men are not simply 'bad' or destructive by their nature, ecofeminists imply that men are spiritually marginalised and separated from nature through their experience. The generalisations and uniform assumptions that ecofeminists make about men are alienating to men: 'Men never think of life. They only want to conquer nature and the enemy.'<sup>xv</sup> These sentiments and blanket statements may arise from a rage that should not be devaluated but the experiences of men have variety just as women's do. Men, like women are divided by class, ethnicity and so forth. Many suffer poverty and human rights abuses as do women.

Ecofeminists argue that 'truth' is contextual and plural<sup>xvii</sup> and reality is like a patchwork quilt with no absolute story within. Perhaps this is the way in which we should view ecofeminism itself. Not as 'the' truth but as a contribution to understanding, that can be augmented from other sources with different viewpoints. Viewing ecofeminism in such a way moves its project towards compatibility with an inclusive democracy that synthesises democratic and socialist, radical green, feminist and libertarian traditions.<sup>xviii</sup>

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<sup>ii</sup> Nancy R. Howell, 'Ecofeminism: what one needs to know', *Zygon*, Vol. 32 No. 2, (1997) p. 231

<sup>iii</sup> Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern*, (London: Zed Books, 1997), Chapter 2

<sup>iv</sup> Howell, , 'Ecofeminism: what one needs to know', pp. 232-233.

<sup>v</sup> Howell, , 'Ecofeminism: what one needs to know', pp. 232-233; Karren J. Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism', *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 12 No. 1, (1990) pp. 126-132, 139.

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<sup>vii</sup> D. Hicks, 'Identifying Sources of Hope in Postmodern Times', in R. Slaughter (Ed), *New Thinking For a New Millenium*, (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 3; Howell,

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- viii Warren, 'The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism', pp. 138-139
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- xv Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, Chapters 5-6; Barry, 'The Emergence of an Ecofeminist Political Economy', p150-155
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- xvii Mies, 'Women have no Fatherland', pp. 120-121
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- xxi Shiva, 'Masculinization of the Motherland', pp. 109-111
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- <sup>xxxv</sup> Crittenden, 'Ecofeminism meets business: A comparison of ecofeminist, corporate, and free market ideologies', pp. 53-54; Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, pp. 8-13
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