

## Ecofeminism as Sociology\*

By Ariel Salleh

### 1. Realism, Constructionism, and the Humanity-Nature Question

The human relation to what is called “nature,” has become a focus of social thought in our time, with a new “eco-politics” given over to it, and ecofeminists, eco-Marxists, social ecologists, and deep ecologists, each offering unique conceptualizations. But conversation about the humanity-nature problematic seems to provoke both public confusion and intellectual hostility. Meanwhile, an insurgent globalizing resistance to neo-liberalism and its ecological crisis, develops strategies across the humanity-nature interface with little help from sociological theory. However, one sociologist Peter Dickens, has suggested that the difficulties people have in thinking about this connection result from the modernist industrial division of labor and its inevitable knowledge fragmentation. Like ecofeminists Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Mary Mellor, and myself, he argues that the marginalization of lay and tacit forms of knowledge under industrialization, means that people lose a sense of their own organic nature, environmental abuse being an effect of this alienation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Dickens, *Reconstructing Nature: Alienation, Emancipation, and the Division of Labour* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 1. The ecofeminist sociology includes Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books, 1993); Mary Mellor, *Feminism and Ecology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997); and Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (London: Zed Books, and New York: St. Martins Press, 1997).

The celebrated English sociologist Anthony Giddens also visits the topic of “disembedding,” attributing it to the phenomenon of globalization.<sup>2</sup> But Giddens is generally optimistic, while Dickens sees the modernist division of labor alienating individuals and pulverizing social relations. Like Marx, or really Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Dickens observes how abstract professional knowledges which inform modern labor processes become fetishized. And he cites the case of environmental economics here:

...attaching monetary value to environmental systems (or, more accurately, very limited parts of such systems) and abstracting them away from the processes involved in their production: not only the social and political processes involved [are externalized] [so too is the] knowledge of the relations with the causal powers of nature engaged during their production.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, under capitalism, such expertise is traded as a commodity, dislocated from its material source.

Before moving on to consider the subsistence alternative, it is worth noting that in making a claim for material grounding, Dickens himself draws on abstract knowledge, namely philosophic assumptions which combine critical realism and social constructionism in a dialectical way. Careful ecofeminist accounts of the human relation to nature likewise rely on this kind of explanation. Realism per se, posits nature as an expression of complex internal relations — some being general processes like thermodynamic principles, and others contingent factors like seasonal variability. A “critical realism” accepts this, but on the understanding that a *sui generis* nature is mainly known through the medium of socially constructed languages — often elaborate disciplinary ones.<sup>4</sup> A critical realist approach to the humanity-nature question must be prepared to cross these socially constructed disciplinary boundaries — physics, biology, sociology. Moreover, it will track back and forth between degrees of abstraction within disciplines, viz the movement in sociology between individual and social structure.

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<sup>2</sup>Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity* (Oxford: Polity, 1991).

<sup>3</sup>Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour* (London: Macmillan, 1978) and Dickens, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>4</sup>Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1989).

Such an explanation articulates general processes and particular contingencies that converge in any concrete outcome; and also, forces at different levels of abstraction which actively determine that same conjuncture. Like dialectics, this kind of theory making relies on a notion of complex causality or over-determination and it moves constantly between abstract and concrete forms. Such knowledge is described as tacit when the apprehension of internally related forces is not put into a language. Lay knowledge, often confused with tacit knowledge, is sometimes said to remain concrete. But by my own ecofeminist conjecture, it is political interests which constrain the further articulation of lay knowledges.

## 2. The Division between Productive and Reproductive Labor

Despite an emphasis on the division of labor, Dickens' proto-ecofeminist sociology is inspired less by Durkheim than by Marx. Substantively, he treats nature as man's inorganic body and knowledge as rooted in practice; his object is to replace alienation with emancipation.<sup>5</sup> Marxism identifies various forms of individual alienation and, at another level of abstraction, these can be read as contradictions or structural crises destabilizing capitalist societies. The most often discussed contradiction occurs between social relations of production versus forces of production. For example, since profits are generated by labor, the displacement of jobs by new technologies may undermine future profits.<sup>6</sup> Another contradictory moment occurs between conditions of production versus social relations of production. For example, since workers' health is often damaged by factory conditions and local pollution, this may undermine their future function as productive labor. Yet a further contradictory moment occurs between forces of production versus external nature. For example: since the material base of industrial provisioning is ecosystemic, damage by ongoing resource extraction may undermine the availability of future inputs.

An ecofeminist perspective is readily compatible with this materialist analysis, but it seeks to re-frame these contradictions using a different lens. In this respect, Maria Mies' classic text *Patriarchy and*

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<sup>5</sup>Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour* (New York: Free Press, 1964); Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>Karl Marx, *Capital* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

*Accumulation* was path breaking.<sup>7</sup> Like many other new social movements, ecofeminism privileges a politics of the body focused on sexuality, race, and environmental habitat. In this, it engages directly with the humanity-nature problematic. Marxist analyses of nature's commodification also deal with this interface, but there is a shift in ecofeminism away from production towards reproduction in its several senses. Since, as another English sociologist John Urry reminds us, the term reproduction may apply to biological processes, economic relations, or cultural practices.<sup>8</sup> In its treatment of the divisions of labor by which humans negotiate their social relation with nature, Marxism is suggestive but not sufficiently explicit on the role of reproductive labor. This has led to confusing sociological claims like Jürgen Habermas' surmise that ecology and feminism belong to civil society and are therefore not class-based movements. Is class membership merely the prerogative of a privileged few?<sup>9</sup>

Certainly Marxist sociologists like Sean Sayer accept class and gender as mutually determining categories.<sup>10</sup> But where exactly does gendered reproductive labor stand in the big picture? During the 1970s feminists engaged inconclusively with this question in what became known as "the domestic labor debate."<sup>11</sup> Ecofeminist thinking broadens that earlier emancipatory agenda by integrating ecopolitical concerns — equality, cultural diversity, and sustainability. In fact, the constructionist aspect of ecofeminism interrogates the very foundations of historical materialism, with its supposedly transhistorical concepts of history, nature, and labor. Offering a transcendent critique, it asks whether there are not yet deeper causal structures, general processes and particular contingencies, formative of older gender innocent Marxist

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<sup>7</sup>Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation* (London: Zed Books, 1986), also Salleh, *op. cit.* Marxism is not the only culprit: compare Salleh, "Deeper than Deep Ecology," *Environmental Ethics*, 1984, Vol. 6, pp. 335-341 and ensuing decade of debate in the journal.

<sup>8</sup>John Urry, *The Anatomy of Capitalist Societies: The Economy, Civil Society, and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

<sup>9</sup>Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Polity, 1989).

<sup>10</sup>Thus, "the only way out of this impasse is to confront the intransitive and irreducible nature of each major structure of oppression in its own right, while realising that gender, division of labour, and class are constructed simultaneously and reciprocally." S. Sayer and R. Walker, *The New Social Economy: Reworking the Division of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 40, quoted in Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>11</sup>Lydia Sargent, *Women and Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

understandings. An ecofeminist lens addresses reproduction as *a priori* to production, and the implications of this flow on to Marxist concepts of class and contradiction.

### 3. Dialectical Process — Immanent and Transcendent Meanings

Ecofeminists view the humanity versus nature dualism, and the split between productive versus reproductive labors, as reflecting a profound alienation embodied in the social construction of masculine gender identity and the social construction of its thought products. With this gender critique, ecofeminism comes forward as a corrective transitional politics, appropriate to a certain historical conjuncture. It reads beneath the alienations which keep new social movements fragmented and single issue. And it invites ecopolitical activists and theorists of eco-Marxism, social ecology, or deep ecology, to be more reflexive about how they absorb and reinforce profoundly gendered forms of alienation. In undertaking this task, ecofeminism becomes a sociology of knowledge.

The ecofeminist lens used in this paper develops the work of Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, and some of my own earlier statements. It can be characterized as an “embodied materialism.”<sup>12</sup> It is “materialist” in endorsing the basic tools of a Marxist sociology, and “embodied” in that it sets out to re-frame that discourse by giving equal weight to the organically interrelated entities — man, woman, nature. Historically, these have been unequally valorized. In particular, the interests of male dominated societies have been served by managing women’s bodies as a “natural resource.” That meant positioning the female sex “somewhere between” men and nature in the order of things.<sup>13</sup> This masculinist practice points to a fundamental structural contradiction in capitalism, a node of crisis not yet included in the conversations of political economy.

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<sup>12</sup>Mies and Vandana Shiva, *op. cit.*; and on embodied materialism *per se*, Salleh, *op. cit.* Although re-visioning political economy, the ecofeminist project is broader and more inclusive than the approach taken by eco-Marxist philosophers. See Ted Benton, *Natural Relations, Ecology, Animal Rights, and Social Justice* (London: Verso, 1993); Tim Hayward, *Ecological Thought* (Oxford: Polity, 1995).

<sup>13</sup>Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1981).

In unpacking the irrational contradiction which locates women, and usually indigenes, simultaneously within humanity and nature, the following ecofeminist deconstruction tacks between critical realism and social constructionism in a dialectical way. Dialectics provides a very helpful model for thinking about process and change.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the static positivist “cat is a cat” mindset, dialecticians trace the emergence and retreat of entities. This involves studying the interplay of meanings — immanent and transcendent, active and latent. For example, an activist or reader of ecofeminism as a transformative project, will be aware that terms such as “reason,” “women,” and so on, carry both an immanent, lay, ideological usage, and a transcendent, abstract, critical one. On the other hand, sometimes the abstract usage is ideological and the lay one fosters critique. As Ashis Nandy has written in the context of a postcolonial politics:

I like to believe that each such concept in this work is a *double entendre*: on the one hand, it is part of an oppressive structure; on the other, it is in league with its victims.<sup>15</sup>

Another illustration of immanent and transcendent meanings occurs in the analysis of ecofeminist politics. This is because ecofeminists tread a zig-zag course between (1) their liberal and socialist feminist task of establishing the right to a political voice; (2) their radical and poststructuralist feminist task of undermining the very basis of that same validation; and (3) their properly ecological feminist task of demonstrating how most women — and thence men too — can live differently with nature. Now each phase of strategy implies different senses of woman, politics, nature, reason, and so on, but an understanding of context and intention makes clear which sense is active and which is latent. This dialectical openness or indeterminacy, indicates that ecofeminism is not an essentialist theory. That said, what Gayatri Spivak names as “strategic essentialism” is sometimes relied on for pragmatic emphasis.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Bertell Ollman, *Dialectical Investigations* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>15</sup>Ahis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. xiv.

<sup>16</sup>Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Methuen, 1987).

#### 4. Looking through an Embodied Materialist Lens

But enough about words. Recalling Marx's eleventh thesis, Dickens urges:

[The] insistence that changing our thought alone is sufficient to stop fragmentation and create an emancipated society misses the core underlying processes which cause the fragmentations.<sup>17</sup>

Social transformation requires both theory and praxis. This is why an "embodied materialist" sociology, grounded in reproductive labor, is strong medicine for intellectual alienations and confusions of the industrial division of labor. For while industrialized productive labor is historically contingent, reproductive labor is necessary, integral, and attuned to general causal processes within the ecosystem. Many indigenous peoples actually use a single word for this humanity-nature nexus, a partnership of people in/with country.

Keeping focus for now on women and the modernist division of labor, it is plain that their relation to nature, and therefore to "capital" and "labor," is constructed, and constructs itself, differently to men's relation to nature in several ways. A first difference involves experiences mediated by female body organs in the hard but sensuous labors of birthing and suckling. A second difference follows from women's historically assigned caring and maintenance chores that serve to "bridge" men and nature. A third difference involves women's manual work in making goods as farmers, cooks, herbalists, potters, and so on. The fourth difference involves creating symbolic representations of "feminine" relations to "nature" — in poetry, in painting, in philosophy, and everyday talk. Through this constellation of lay labors, the great majority of women around the world are organically and discursively implicated in life-affirming activities, and they develop gender-specific knowledges grounded in this material base. As a result, women across cultures have begun to express political views that are quite removed from men's approaches to global crisis — whether these be corporate greenwash, ecological ethics, or socialism.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>18</sup>Adapted from Ariel Salleh, "Nature, Woman, Labor, Capital: Living the Deepest Contradiction" in Martin O'Connor, ed., *Is Capitalism Sustainable? Political Economy and the Politics of Ecology* (New York: Guilford, 1994), p. 107.

There are elements of both realism and social constructionism in this description, and here another of Dickens' sociological perceptions coincides with ecofeminist reasoning:

[T]he languages people use to understand nature and their relationships with it may be a product of people's innate causal powers to make sense of their circumstances.<sup>19</sup>

An acceptance of this judgment enables the practical experience and lay knowledge of workers outside of the modernist division of labor to be taken seriously. More than this, it indicates that particular labor qualities inherent in what these workers do shape their skills and insights just as much as learned role socialization does. There is an overdetermination, between bodily capacities, gender conditioning, and what these workers learn from their prescribed economic chores — that daily round of “mediating nature” on behalf of men.

This lay knowledge defies conventional sociological stratifications of class and race, for women world-wide undertake reproductive labor — biological, economic, cultural — at some stage of their lives. But neither is ecofeminism “sociobiological;” nor an argument that “women are closer to nature” or “better than men;” nor yet a celebration of “the essential feminine” as superficial readers sometimes conclude. To amplify the argument for an embodied materialist perspective, and meta-industrial labor as a unique class location, I will visit three kinds of reproductive labor typically carried out by women — subsistence farming, housework, and parenting.<sup>20</sup> In considering these exemplars, the reader should bear Marx's early anthropology in mind. As Dickens puts it:

Human beings...not only reach natural limits but make something new of themselves as a result of humanising nature. They realise new powers with which they were born but which they did not know they had.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 12. This also seems to be instantiated by the different responses of men and women in the University of Sussex, Mass Observation Survey.

<sup>20</sup>The text in this section borrows from Salleh, 1997, *op. cit.*, and Ariel Salleh, “The Meta-Industrial Class and Why We Need It, *Democracy & Nature*, 2000, Vol. 6, pp. 27-36.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted in Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 104.



A classic statement of material agency in scientific complexity occurs in Vandana Shiva's study of Indian women subsistence farmers.

It is in managing the integrity of ecological cycles in forestry and agriculture that women's [re]productivity has been most developed and evolved. Women transfer fertility from the forests to the field and to animals. They transfer animal waste as fertiliser for crops and crop by-products to animals as fodder. This partnership between women's work and nature's work ensures the sustainability of sustenance.<sup>22</sup>

In parallel vein, German ecology activist Ulla Terlinden spells out the tacit dialectical epistemology behind domestic reproduction.

Housework requires of women [or men] a broad range of knowledge and ability. The nature of the work itself determines its organization. The work at hand must be dealt with *in its entirety*....The worker must possess a high degree of personal synthesis, initiative, intuition and flexibility.<sup>23</sup>

Contrast this total engagement with the fragmented industrial division of labor and the numb inconsequential mindset that it gives rise to.

### **5. Holding Nature: The Meta-Industrial Class and its Vantage Point**

In discussing parental skills, philosopher Sara Ruddick introduces a notion of "holding" labor, which again embodies the principles of good ecological reasoning.

To hold means to minimize risk and to reconcile differences rather than to sharply accentuate them. Holding is a way of seeing with an eye toward maintaining the minimal harmony, material resources, and skills necessary for sustaining a child in safety. It is the attitude elicited by world protection, world-preservation, world repair.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. 45.

<sup>23</sup>Ulla Terlinden, "Women in the Ecology Movement," in E. Altbach, et al., eds., *German Feminism* (Albany: SUNY, 1984), p. 320.

<sup>24</sup>Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon, 1989), p. 79.

Paradoxically, while minimizing risk, “holding” is the ultimate expression of adaptability. As against the positivist separation of fact and value, space and time which marks science as usual, interconnectedness is commonsense in this matter/reality.<sup>25</sup>

Sociologist Barbara Adam offers yet another sensitive analysis of human engagement with the interlocking cycles of nature.<sup>26</sup> When the material substrate of life is processed by manufacture and put up for a price, the socially contrived focus on “things” misses the myriad of exchanges and reverberations which hold nature as matter together. Adams describes how people’s sensitivity to nature’s implicate timings is colonized by the clock of capitalist production and its administering state. Citizen consumers are disempowered by this one dimensional landscape and only able to grasp “what is,” in contrast to “what can be.” In other words, appearance subsumes essence or the unrealized potential of nature.

Each of these ecofeminists describe a non-alienating way of objectifying natural human energies in labor. An embodied materialist sociology highlights the relational logic of this labor form and a sensibility that has been marginalized, censored, and repressed by the vanities of modernity. But meta-industrial labor as a general process of human partnership with nature is not necessarily gender specific. Rather, the gendering is an historically contingent aspect of industrialized societies. Conversely, ecological holding is found in both genders among indigenous peoples. By custom, Australian Aboriginal workers practice a kind of holding, nurturing sustainability as they move through the country. Thus the hunter gathering mode of production is really “reproductive” in that it does not take more than it needs; does not splice and package land in legal title for fear of losing it. Rather, the seasonal walk is made in the knowledge that each habitat will replenish and provide again on the return.<sup>27</sup>

Self-managed Aboriginal provisioning generates lay knowledges that are not only environmentally benign, but also creatively social. Besides subsistence, it fosters learning, participation, innovation,

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<sup>25</sup>For an ecofeminist exploration of the semantics of matter/matrix/materiality, see Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (London: Womens Press, 1979).

<sup>26</sup>Barbara Adam, *Timescapes of Modernity: The Environment and Invisible Hazards* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>27</sup>Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996).

ritual, identity and belonging. Indigenous peoples are known to achieve a high quality of life with only three hours work a day. On the other hand, the engineered satisfiers of modern industrial societies like bureaucracies and cars, cost much time and energy, often sabotaging the very convenience they were designed for.<sup>28</sup> Reproductive labor is a metabolic bridging of human and natural cycles. But productive labors pursue a single goal whether in “controlled” laboratory science, agribusiness, mining and smelting. This instrumentalism collides with complex patterns of material exchange in nature leaving disorder.

To reiterate: in principle, holding labors transcend differences of class, race, gender, and age, though in practice, under modernity, they have become the province of low status groups like women domestic caregivers, organic farmers, and indigenes. Each of these workers occupies an unspoken space in the industrial division of labor and in Marxism, its theoretical mirror. This is a remarkable sociological omission, but an especially salient one in today’s ecological crisis. Meta-industrial provisioning, using simple ways of adapting nature to meet human needs, demonstrates an already functioning minimalist infrastructure, without ecologically damaging forces of production or socially oppressive relations of production. Meta-industrial labor literally embodies the precautionary principle — and increasingly applies it beyond home and neighborhood to political action at large. Ecofeminists like Maria Mies, and others inspired by her sociological analysis, see our work as validating these already existing “moral economies” as they start to challenge the depravities of neo-liberalism.

### **6. Common Objections from the Modernist Division of Labor**

Yet, for sociologists of “ecological modernization” like Arthur Mol and David Sonnenfeld, the exemplary properties of reproductive labor remain invisible.<sup>29</sup> For as noted earlier, the technologies which mediate daily needs in industrial societies numb people to their organic embodiment as nature. Sociologists, whose profession is both a cause and effect of modern knowledge fragmentation, may react especially negatively to an argument that challenges Durkheim’s study of society

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<sup>28</sup>Manfred Max-Neef, et al, *Human Scale Development* (New York: Apex, 1991). And further, as Dickens notes (*op. cit.*, p. 123), even the US Department of Agriculture concedes that alternative biodynamic food production saves energy!

<sup>29</sup>Arthur Mol and David Sonnenfeld, eds., *Ecological Modernization Around the World* (London: Frank Cass, 1999).

*sui generis*. Others with a stake in the hegemonic division of labor may be uncomfortable with the idea that lay knowledges carry any abstract significance. Objections to taking meta-industrial labor seriously may also come from Marxists and liberal feminist development theorists — each having tacitly evolutionist attitudes and a colonizing commitment to Westernization as progress.

But even Scott Lash's radically postmodern sociology of "detraditionalization" plays into this tendency.<sup>30</sup> To label meta-industrial labor "traditional," is to lose sight of the fact that food growing and domestic maintenance are mediations of nature which will remain essential under any historically contingent mode of production. Again, ignoring the worker's necessary embodiment in a sustaining material ground, David Harvey maintains:

For Marxists there can be no going back, as many ecologists seem to propose, to an unmediated relation to nature (or a world built solely on face to face relations), to a pre-capitalist and communitarian world of non-scientific understandings with limited divisions of labor.<sup>31</sup>

The lynch pin of this assertion is the word "unmediated." And it reveals a typically modernist and masculinist idea of a somehow "un-reproduced," autonomous labor, one that is inevitably technologized. Moreover, the tacit knowledges which enable the face to face reproductive sphere are reified by Harvey, and rejected as "pre-scientific."

Gender bias, in and beyond academic sociology, consistently diminishes the rationality of meta-industrial skills and insights. Unfortunately, in advanced industrial societies, middle class women, even feminists enjoying professional status, may become complicit in this. Rewarded for adopting a dominant neo-liberal or laborist sensibility and values, some women express contempt for the lot of subsistence farmers, mothers and domestic workers, despite the fact that most of their sisters are "unreconstructed" mediators of nature. Cecile Jackson's feminist critique of ecofeminism is a case in point. It fails to grasp the difference between an immanent "here and now" discourse, and a transcendent one. Thus she reads a layered ecopolitical argument about re-valORIZING exchanges between "man, woman, and nature," through a

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<sup>30</sup>P. Heelas, S. Lash, and P. Morris, eds., *Detraditionalisation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>31</sup>David Harvey, "The Nature of the Environment: The Dialectics of Social and Environmental Change," *Socialist Register*, 1993, Part III, p. 42.

narrow single issue lens focused on emancipation of women in modernist terms.<sup>32</sup> Jackson's pro-development line, like Harvey's, also relies on an idealized, unreflexive view of science, quite out of place in an era of exploitive free trade regimes and greenhouse pollution. In the words of German sociologist Ulrich Beck:

Science has become *the protector of a global contamination of people and nature...*[In] the way they deal with risks in many areas, the sciences have squandered *until further notice their historic reputation for rationality.*<sup>33</sup>

### 7. An Inclusive Participatory Theory/Strategy for Global Resistance

Progressive thinkers readily admit that, in our century, the knowledge base and objectives of white middle class male decision-makers are largely what exacerbate environmental damage. But they are less clear about more positive human links with nature. This is where Dickens' sociological vision for moving beyond the modernist *impasse*, again resonates with the ecofeminist project:

Emancipation lies in linking dominant forms of abstract, explicit, global and expert knowledges to subordinated, concrete, tacit, local and lay understandings.<sup>34</sup>

The present essay, joins meta-industrial skills and insights to abstract conceptualizations like sociology and ecology. But it also asserts that lay knowledge contains a rationality in its own right. Nevertheless, as sociologists move towards inclusive theory, they will need not to destroy this precious cultural diversity by semantic subsumption or

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<sup>32</sup>Cecile Jackson, "Radical Environmental Myths: A Gender Perspective," *New Left Review*, 210, 1995, and reply by Salleh, "An Ecofeminist Bioethic and What Post-Humanism Really Means," *New Left Review*, 217, 1996. Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991) falls into the same trap as Jackson, criticising Shiva's analysis of the Chipko movement from a liberal feminist position, when Shiva's concern is a moral economy and a people's science.

<sup>33</sup>Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 80, Beck's italics.

<sup>34</sup>Dickens, *op cit.*, p. 205.

repressive tolerance.<sup>35</sup> For example, in Marx's materialism, "humanizing nature" means re-making it, whereas through an embodied materialism, nature is humanized in partnership.

In a time of powerful grassroots resistance to globalization, an ecofeminist lens opens Marxist theory and strategy to knowledges from the widest possible base of political participation. And what is said of material production is applicable to theoretical production here.

[T]he division of labor needs changing in such a way that people are given the opportunity to be involved in the creation of the product itself.<sup>36</sup>

Seizing the moment, ecofeminists point to an unformulated "meta-industrial class" and a very specific humanity-nature contradiction in the late capitalist division of labor. In this dialectic, theory lags way behind practice: for exemplary moral economies and benign peoples' sciences already exist. The problem that besets hitherto existing sociology is that a theoretic reconfiguring of the historically deleted human identity with nature requires new modes of abstraction. My argument therefore, is that the nexus where reproductive labor and its knowledges mediate humanity and nature is the most promising vantage point for an ecologically literate sociology. At this site, ecopolitical strategies for ecology, feminism, postcolonial, and socialist movements can also find common ground.

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<sup>35</sup>Regarding knowledge theft in the ecological sphere. A case in point is biopiracy of the Indian neem tree by the US pharmaceutical W. R. Grace. Happily, ecofeminist Shiva and others succeeded in a court challenge to quash the patent. On repressive assimilation of radical ideas, Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Abacus, 1972).

<sup>36</sup>Dickens, *op. cit.*, p. 197.