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## *An Ecofeminist Bio-Ethic and What Post-Humanism Really Means*

A holocaust goes on among us: tomorrow at dawn, another ancient plant or bird will be extinct; nine-hundred million people starve;<sup>1</sup> dammed-up rivers run sour and parched soils crack open; continents swarm with environmental refugees; man-made viruses are unleashed; silently, an ozone hole and electro-magnetic radiation cull new cancer victims; oil spills suffocate sea life and melting seas threaten island communities; body parts and DNA are carved up and traded; city people breathe sulphurous air, their food laced with wartime pesticides; and mothers bear limbless jelly babies from nuclear fallout that rings the globe. Will you too, close your eyes to these crimes, the linear model of 'progress' exported by an enlightened West?

Certainly, our humanist 'social science' has failed to grasp such happenings, numb to the palpable materiality of nature's decimation. And writing as if 'ecology' were merely an irritating new world view, many left intellectuals argue that the 'central issue' in ecopolitical thought should be the status of 'human rights' versus those of non-human species. Cecile Jackson takes this line in her essay, 'Radical Environmental Myths: A Gender Perspective'.<sup>2</sup> As a feminist, Jackson is rightly concerned about how radical ecology's post-humanist bio-ethic will affect the lot of women and other disadvantaged people. Accordingly, she urges us to engender environmental debate without delay. For, in the ongoing 'struggle for recognition of women's full humanity', Jackson suspects women are now losing political ground to non-human species.

### Ecofeminism and Gender Analysis

Gender studies look at how masculine and feminine behaviours are historically shaped and culturally specific. Jackson writes as if no Green theory had yet integrated such analysis, but gender-focused contributions to environmental philosophy have been ongoing for at least two decades, as well as hearty debates between women and the ecopolitical

establishment.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to Jackson's opposing movements approach, ecological feminists integrate the two struggles, observing that: 'The marginalization of women and the destruction of biodiversity go hand in hand. Loss of diversity is the price paid in the [Eurocentric] patriarchal model of progress which pushes inexorably toward monocultures, uniformity and homogeneity.'<sup>4</sup> The international ecofeminist literature is substantial, consisting of newsletters, articles, anthologies, and some two dozen classic texts. Scholarly works include activist D'Arbonne's *Feminism or Death* (1974), leftist theologian Ruether's *New Woman, New Earth* (1975), historian of science Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1981), sociologist Mies's *Patriarchy and Accumulation* (1986), physicist Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1989), and philosopher Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993).

By sidelining gender analysis in ecofeminist writing, Jackson misrepresents its politics as a form of naturalistic reductionism. Ecofeminist theorists may indeed discuss the significance of biological and sexed activities such as birthing, but not without understanding that feminine and masculine gender identities are historically, culturally and discursively mediated. Jackson's recent self-positioning as an advocate for gender analysis thus seems oddly uninformed. Her demand for a 'historical political economy to make sense of linkages' between culture and nature and, her statement that 'gendered studies of local knowledges are conspicuously absent', ignores Pietila's work on Finnish housewives and GNP; Mies' study of piece workers in Narsapur; or for that matter, my account of women's ecological consciousness-raising in Australia's steel city.<sup>5</sup>

If Jackson's claim about the lack of gender analysis in ecofeminism is inadequately researched, equally her critique mistranslates several basic propositions. To take an example or two: she quotes Mies and Shiva's *Ecofeminism* (1993) as saying: 'In grassroots movements... it is women more than men who understand that a subsistence perspective is the only guarantee of survival for all.'<sup>6</sup> Reading with essentialist eyes, Jackson finds here a claim that a priori, regardless of gender socialization, women are somehow innately better able to understand daily survival needs. In fact, Mies and Shiva see women's practical ecopolitical sensibility as a learned outcome of gender-ascribed labours and responsibilities. Moreover, as ecofeminists, they want to move beyond the oppressive division of labour that loads so much on women's shoulders with so few

<sup>1</sup>Jackson dates the upsurge of public interest in environmentalism from 1994, whereas it goes back at least to Earth Day 1970 in the USA; or the birth of the world's first Green party in Tasmania 1972. A gendered challenge to ecocentrism was delivered in 1983: See Ariel Salleh, 'Deeper than Deep Ecology: The Ecofeminist Connection', *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 6, 1984, pp. 335-41; followed by 'The Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate: A Reply to Patriarchal Reason', *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 14, 1992, pp. 195-216 and 'Class, Race, and Gender Discourse in the Ecofeminism/Deep Ecology Debate', *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 15, 1993, pp. 225-44.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, London 1993, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths', p. 136; compare Hilikka Pietila, 'Women as an Alternative Culture: Here and Now', *Development*, vol. 4, 1984; Maria Mies, *The Lame-makers of Narsapur*, London 1982; Ariel Salleh, 'Environment: Consciousness and Action', *Journal of Environmental Education*, vol. 20, 1988. See also 'Nature, Woman, Labour, Capital', in M. O'Connor, ed., *Is Capitalism Sustainable?*, New York 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths', p. 130, citing Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, p. 303. Gender statistics on the environmental labour force underscore women's peculiar attraction to a politics of protecting nature.

<sup>1</sup> Press release no. 8330, UN General Assembly, New York 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Cecile Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths: A Gender Perspective', NLR 210, pp. 124-140.

resources or supports. Their analysis is not only thoroughly gendered, but socialist, calling for grassroots resistance to a transnational economic system based on privatization of commons. Mies and Shiva strive for a socially de-gendered non-division of labour; regional self-reliance; and minimum production designed for satisfaction of vital needs, leaving time over for loving, and creative play.

In parallel vein, when Banuri and Apffel Marglin in *Who Will Save the Forest?* say that 'women's ways of knowing...often have a non-instrumental core', Jackson condemns the observation as pre-gendered and thus essentializing.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, men can be non-instrumental, but the point is that under 'actually existing' social arrangements they are rewarded for being operators. As Shiva tells us, in the forests of northern India, local men are readily drawn into the cash economy based on logging for export; Mathai has observed the same in Kenya, and Lechte in Papua New Guinea. Ruddick's philosophical thesis too, in *Maternal Thinking*, gets an essentializing read from Jackson.<sup>8</sup>

Yet it is Jackson herself, who expounds Ruddick as if 'mothering' described a sex or gender-specific set of attributes. In fact, Ruddick points out that men too, can do this caring work, and she is at pains to disconnect the skills and knowledges of mothering from either sex or gender. Looking more closely into Jackson's text, it becomes plain that her focus on apparently essentialized attributes is a by-product of her own emphasis on individuality. This stops her from seeing that ecofeminist politics is interested in relational change—the lines that join individual points being more important than the points themselves. Epistemologically speaking, people experienced in mothering know just how delicate the line between self and other identity is, a perceptual maturation that is readily transferred to an ecological context.

Likewise, when Mies talks about 'consumer self-interest', she is not referring to some Hobbesian essential nature; rather, she is noting the typical behaviours of people forced to live under capitalism. Globalized capital pulls us away from a sense of place, community bonds, and sensitivity to preservation of the local ecosystem. But Jackson is wary of mean-minded parochialism in a politics organized bio-regionally. Ecofeminists too, acknowledge that possibility, and continually work to expose sexist behaviours and old-style familialism in all politically transformative work. What Jackson omits to concede is how pettiness turns up in our failing nation-state bureaucracies as well. It is not the human scale of ecocentric politics which is faulty, but something far more fundamental to our social practices.

### The Immanent Logic of Capital

The term 'essentialism' is routinely called in as hit man by men and women looking for a quick theoretical put-down of some feminisms. However, as Spivak notes, it is 'used by non-philosophers simply to mean all kinds of things, when they don't know what other word to use...

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths', p. 134, on T. Banuri and F. Apffel Marglin, eds, *Who Will Save the Forest?*, London 1993, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking*, Boston 1989.

anti-essentialism is a way of not doing one's theoretical homework.<sup>9</sup> The reality is, as Fuss's scholarly work on discursive modes reminds us, 'essentialism' is a pre-condition of any political work. So bourgeois liberal rational-choice theorists call on 'a theory of human nature' and essentialize 'interests'.<sup>10</sup> Socialists must essentialize 'class' in order to mobilize their transcendent vision. The proletariat is spoken of as an homogenous group, and for organizational purposes, regional differences and internal class fractions are played down. Feminism too, can only function by treating 'women' as an essential category. However, Jackson, borrowing the post-modern distaste for generalization, attempts to discredit Mies and Shiva's theoretical analysis for essentializing and idealizing women, reducing differences between them. In fact, ecofeminists are very aware of the complementary roles Third World and Western women as producers and consumers respectively, are called upon to play; but they are equally aware of exploited factory workers in the US, say, or of Third World elite women tied to a Western life style of high consumption.

It would be easy to assume that Jackson trivializes ecofeminism so as to clear the centre ground for her own 'gender perspective'. But the source of her distortions appears methodological rather than motivational. 'Radical Environmental Myths' consistently fails to distinguish between immanent and transcendent discourse, so attributing contradictions to ecofeminist writing which are not actually there. Hence, Mies and Shiva are presented as unsympathetic to urban migrants in the Third World, while Jackson condones the movement away from rural subsistence economies as a necessary survival strategy. But the latter focus is palliative and totally framed within the immanent logic of corporate expansion. Mies and Shiva, on the other hand, make their case in transcendent voice, demanding an end to manipulative development regimes that destabilize viable farm communities and their environments. Both standpoints are humanist, but the ecofeminist one is bio-ethical as well, for it is not a case of either humanity or nature.

and other confusions over ecofeminism, result from the synchronic rather than process-based habit of thought which informs Jackson's essay. So, when Mies says things like 'freedom is the freedom of those who possess money', Jackson paints it as tacitly offensive to women struggling for higher wages.<sup>11</sup> Mies and Shiva would opt out of the exchange society altogether, and they explore innovative ways to invigorate reciprocity and community in the West. Against this, Jackson urges that 'non-monetized relations can be deeply exploitative' and ecofeminists would accept that. But even if gender equality were to be realized under capitalist or socialist systems of production, that would not necessarily improve the lot of other humans and species.

The fight for equal pay is a survival matter for many of us, and in an immanent sense, a major step forward in realizing an enlightened humanism. But ultimately, these struggles lead down a political cul-de-

<sup>9</sup> Gayatri Spivak, interview with Ellen Rooney, *differences*, vol. 1, 1989, pp. 132–3; Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, New York 1989.

<sup>10</sup> For a case of the pot calling the kettle black, see Caroline New, 'Man Bad, Woman Good? Essentialisms and Ecofeminisms', *NLR* 216, pp. 79–93.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths', p. 131, citing Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, p. 66.

sac. Lenin's phrase, 'the trade union mentality', sums it up—if the pie is poison, a bigger slice will do no good. Ecofeminists do not buy into a socialist or postmodern future built on commodified relationships. They are trying to discover alternative strategies which help people here and now, without playing into the hands of an ultimately inhuman and unsustainable global economy. For there is no doubt about it, when activists wheel and deal with capital, they affirm its legitimacy.

### Nature/Culture and Ecocentrism

The first premise of ecofeminism is that patriarchal cultures, most recently the technocratic West, tend to identify women with nature and treat both as resources. Mainstream environmental thought has so far shown little interest in 'the woman question'. Nevertheless, since Jackson assumes that ecofeminism is based on biology, she conflates ecofeminist politics with the ecology movement's ecocentric paradigm.<sup>12</sup> It is true that ecofeminists and ecocentric radicals both affirm the 'internal relatedness of phenomena'—a deep understanding of human embeddedness in ecological relationships. But Jackson's unwittingly sexist subsumption of ecofeminism to an ecocentric philosophy, led by such eminent figures as Worster, Goldsmith, and Guha, produces a very shaky taxonomy. An ecofeminist would not naturalize the caste system, as she maintains that Guha does. Moreover, there are major differences between ecofeminists and other radical environmentalists over women's reproductive rights versus the latter's 'androcentric' demand for population control as panacea to environmental ills.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps nothing more vividly illustrates women's human embodiment in ecological relations than the mother-child symbiosis in pregnancy and its vulnerability to environmental disturbances. This is one reason for the strong focus on toxic dumping and factory labour conditions among ecofeminist activists and scholars.<sup>14</sup> The socialist drive to emancipate women 'as subjects' through equal participation on the production line, overlooks the inevitable costs of industrialization. Jackson sees twentieth century 'high' technologies as empowering to the dispossessed. But this is a very superficial and short-term assessment, albeit one shared by many well-intentioned occupational health activists. The problem is that it fails to come to grips with an eco-logic by which everything is connected to everything else.

While Marx himself was profoundly aware of the fallout from industry and the metabolic flow between humanity and nature, Jackson's socialist

feminism and humanist ethic descend directly from the classic Cartesian self/other, nature/culture dualism. The polarizing and synchronic mindset which frames her critique of ecofeminism will not cope with 'the biological' and 'the sociological' at the same time.<sup>15</sup> Hence the discomfort with ecofeminist references to bodily activities. Omitting to reframe her politics in a way that can respond to global ecological crisis, Jackson holds up the standard bourgeois liberal terminology by which mainstream feminism has made its disembodied case. Her gender analysis is housed in a philosophy of 'rights', despite socialist and ecofeminist traditions exposing the Whig roots of this reductionist ethical notion.<sup>16</sup>

A masculine-identified text, Jackson's essay rejects a womanist bio-ethic based on the model of caring, calling it 'non-rational' and so by implication, fit for the Western intellectual scrapheap.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, having misconstrued Ruddick's scholarly account of 'the rationality of care', she has no way of redeeming this stance. Thus she passes up the chance of using its leverage in a broader deconstruction of 'malestream' humanism and its discontents. It is difficult to understand Jackson's lingering acceptance of patriarchal judgement here, for she acknowledges with approval the overlap between ecofeminist literature and feminist critiques of science.<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps it would help to 'situate' ecofeminist theorizing? In left politics, long captured by intellectual men bodily serviced by women's work, caring has remained invisible and valueless. But while the male body still exists in a theoretical vacuum, ecofeminism has made women's natural processes a site of contestation like no other. For to echo the first ecofeminist premise: women's labour and sexuality is an economic resource, just as much as colonial territories are. In earlier days, socialist feminists were obliged to hold their ground as token men by suppressing talk of the uncultivated body. Where this pressure existed or, if the panic of gender demotion was activated, the mystifying slur of 'essentialism' cast against other feminists was a sure way of shoring up one's socialist-feminist status inside the halls of 'reason'. Ecofeminist writing, which insists that women and men are biological as well as social creatures, is just too threatening an idea in some political contexts. But the raw truth is that we are bodies as well as minds; and bodies embedded in complex ecological linkages—a flux of earth, air, fire and water.

### Neo-Colonialism or Self-Determination?

Conservative reactivity also singses Jackson's suggestion that ecofeminist writers succumb to 'orientalism'. So she writes: 'A dichotomy is presented

<sup>12</sup> Jackson's reliance on Robyn Eckersley's *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, Albany 1992, may have encouraged this subsumption of women's theoretical work.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the debate in *Environmental Ethics*, further gendered criticisms of 'actually existing ecocentrism' have come from Janet Biehl, 'It's Deep but is it Broad?', *Kick It Over*, Winter 1987; Ynestra King, 'What is Ecofeminism?', *The Nation*, 12 December 1987, pp. 702, 730–31; Sharon Doubiago, 'Mama Coyote Talks to the Boys', in J. Plant, ed., *Healing the Wounds*, Philadelphia 1989.

<sup>14</sup> For ecofeminist contributions on health: Rosalie Bertell, 'Unholy Secrets: The Impact of the Nuclear Age on Public Health', in L. Caldecott and S. Leland, eds, *Reclaim the Earth*, London 1983; Pat Costner et al., *We All Live Downstream*, Bureka Springs, AR 1986; Patricia Hynes, *The Recurring Silent Spring*, Oxford 1989; Lin Nelson, 'The Place of Women in Polluted Places', in I. Diamond and G. Orenstein, eds, *Rescuing the World*, San Francisco 1990; Lynette Dumble, 'In the Name of Choice and Freedom: RU486', *21c Magazine*, January 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Sociology has been slow to acknowledge the relative autonomy of biology: presumably a legacy of the profession's grandfather, Durkheim, and his construction of a social reality sui generis. For a good decade, ecofeminist writing has been under attack over its defiance of the nature/culture dualism. However, the recent appearance of M. Redclift and T. Benton, eds, *Social Theory and the Global Environment*, London 1994, shows the sociologists themselves now coming around to our view.

<sup>16</sup> For a socialist-feminist argument on 'rights' see Parveen Adams and Jeffrey Minson, 'The Subject of Feminism', *mf*, vol. 2, 1978, and for an ecofeminist one, Marti Kheel, 'The Liberation of Nature', *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 7, 1985, pp. 135–49.

<sup>17</sup> See also Janet Biehl, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, Boston 1991. Compare also exchanges between Daniel Faber and James O'Connor, Lori Thrupp, Ariel Salleh and Martin O'Connor in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, no. 3, 1989.

<sup>18</sup> Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths', p. 133.

in which the indigenous is valued and the exotic or introduced is devalued.<sup>19</sup> But ecofeminist ideas emerge from a spontaneous ground swell of women from disparate cultures and classes across several continents, often with no knowledge of each other's work. Thus, ecofeminism is not a product of the orientaling 'colonial gaze', but in fact, reverses that gaze by joining with indigenous knowledges in a long overdue deconstruction of the West.<sup>20</sup> Jackson might also ask herself who first formulated the concept of orientalism and for what social advantage? But her essay does not question this concept which now serves Western developmentalist values so well. Rather, in a move that demeans a committed and powerful post-colonial thinker, Jackson suggests that Shiva's ecofeminist work might be celebrated simply because of her Indian name.

Lapsing with regard to ethnicity, gender and speciesism in language, Jackson's article dubs ecofeminist examples of dispossession—Chipko or the Kenya Green Belt movement—'sacred cows'.<sup>21</sup> Then, in order to create its distance from the colonial gaze, her text throws doubt on whether such Third World political efforts can be properly called 'feminist'. By saying this, Jackson herself enunciates a form of orientalism. Since to assert that only Western women could arrive at a notion of feminism is tantamount to saying that while Europeans may have 'cuisine', Africans have 'village cooking'.

Jackson expresses a naive neutralist attitude to technology transfer, oblivious to its key role in neo-colonialism. Her reasoning also comes across as if white men's economics is the only kind. A look at how indigenous economic systems might be viable in their own right and how Western peoples might learn from them would overcome this tacitly racist assumption. In practical terms, hunter-gatherers would have to be the affluent societies par excellence. They are self-sufficient and thus genuinely autonomous. They have a stable interchange with their habitat; use low-impact technologies; work few hours a day; and give energies to social bonds, ceremony and art. Socialists and ecofeminists taking a lesson from the rationality of indigenous cultures might discover how to devise low-demand, low-impact economies where sustainability and social equity can go together.

Closing the gap between rich and poor nations will depend on the industrial West scaling down taken for granted levels of resource use, but that alternative is yet to take hold. Ghosts of corporate-speak are everywhere it seems, even in discussions of feminist and indigenous self-determination. No surprise then, that Jackson's notion of emancipation is pre-Marxist and tied to the liberal logic of 'rights'. Her bourgeois image of

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> Indigenous and other so-called Third World ecofeminists speak for themselves, though given constraints of language and distance, we may or may not get to hear them. Metropolitan ecofeminists tell their own experience, but in helping undermine the Eurocentric development paradigm from inside, they reinforce radical politics at the periphery. Differences between black and white skinned women should not be fetishized. More than one Western ecofeminist has experienced life as an exogamous wife—a white subaltern, subaltern, so to speak. The essay by Maori activist Ngahua Te Awakotuku in Caldecott and Leland, *Reclaim the Earth*, is instructive.

<sup>21</sup> Jackson, p. 126.

feminism and ecology as competing issues is quite common among mainstream feminists, if not socialists, but it rests in a sociology long due for re-examination. To treat socialism, ecology, and feminism as separate political problematics is to adopt a single-issue, pluralist model of political action and a zero-sum functionalist view of how benefits are socially distributed. To fear that women may lose power if other creatures gain standing, is to remain locked into the virile concept of 'power over', rather than investigate the synergistic potential of 'power with'.

Still in the embrace of enlightened man's division of humanity from other species, Jackson's essay presents Mies as dualistic, thereby turning ecofeminist politics inside out. In fact, Mies's rejection of a self-determination, purchased at cost to other groups, is precisely a rejection of the instrumental self/other, subject/object set implicit in any appropriative class hierarchy. While it is true that ecofeminists may redefine self-determination in a bio-ethical sense, Jackson is in error to think that they thereby relinquish women's struggles over female infanticide or domestic violence.<sup>22</sup> Both are major themes in ecofeminist writing, which seeks to understand why femininity is so often not culturally valued. While endorsing both men and women's place as ecological beings, ecofeminism challenges the common androcentric classification of women 'as nature' and men 'as history'. Without recourse to ecofeminist insights, how does Jackson explain this strange phenomenon?

In the present conjuncture, socialist and feminist precepts cry out for revision. Transnational corporate expansion is not only resourcing foreign lands, but using biotechnology to mine the human body itself. As FINRRAGE activists were quick to anticipate, women's reproductive capacities are in the front line of the latest market onslaught, based on cellular bio-prospecting. While Jackson portrays Mies' comment on feminist wage struggles as indifference to the plight of women's self-determination, an astute Mies notes that already, with the arrival of late capitalism 'the bourgeois individual is in process of eliminating itself—a revolutionary train has left the station, but we radicals are not driving'.<sup>23</sup>

### Structuralist Idealism

Ecofeminists do fight for women's rights to be enjoyed, not in grand Thatcherite isolation, but embedded in a web of communal mutuality. In this respect, Mies carries forward a much neglected Marxist theory of internal relations, while Shiva's account of women farmers and forest-dwellers on the Indian subcontinent is an unparalleled application of internal relations to ecology.<sup>24</sup> However, Jackson's implicit Whig politics, means that she can only read Mies's position as a renunciation of self-determination, whereas Mies's ethic is socialist in the deepest sense of that word.

Jackson thinks that Mies and Shiva over-generalize the situation of Western and Third World women, and in addition, accept what they say

<sup>22</sup> Besides Mies and Shiva, see Caldecott and Leland, *Reclaim the Earth*.

<sup>23</sup> Mies and Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, p. 216. FINRRAGE stands for the Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering.

<sup>24</sup> Especially Shiva, *Staying Alive*, London 1989.

at face value. Forgetting reflexivity, but in good structuralist form, she asserts that as theorists, we should tease out the space between women's perceptions and 'actually existing reality'. Dismissing what living women say about their lives as 'myth making', Jackson calls for objectivity. Rather than see insights of the dispossessed as intrinsically, organically, and thereby objectively political, Jackson will interpose the 'theorist' to make a 'critical social analysis'. The scientism of this stance is unusual in feminism, which has been especially sensitive to links between the personal and the political. It also belies Jackson's earlier endorsement of the gendered critique of science.

Like the work of many sociology professionals, Jackson's essay reveals an elitist attitude to theory. The very dichotomization of 'theory' versus 'myth' speaks this hierarchy of knowledges. Yet at the same time, her writing shows a curious indulgence towards relativizing postmodern efforts at deconstruction. Perhaps the missing link is the idealism shared by structuralist socialism and postmodern discourse analysis? Jackson discusses knowledge in a top-down way, rather than seeing it grow out of bodily exchanges with material nature: such as loving and working, to use plain English. Not surprisingly, besides Mies, Shiva, and Apffel Marglin, other sources of 'radical myth' which disturb her, are Rose's *Love, Power, and Knowledge*, (1994), and Plant who writes in the bio-regional magazine *New Catalyst* (1987).

In an uneasy mix of postmodern discourse analysis and structuralist objectivism, Jackson tells the reader: 'I believe perceptions of reality are relativist and plural, but I also believe that one cannot avoid making value judgements about which perceptions are closer to some actually existing reality.'<sup>25</sup> While ecofeminists readily adopt a feminist standpoint epistemology, apposite to a politics of oppressed groups, no guidance is provided by Jackson as to what her unavoidable 'value judgements' will rest on.<sup>26</sup> Will she fix her social bearings by Taylorist feminism or some variety of socialist orthodoxy? If so, would Jackson adopt such doctrine on faith? How else can she presume to distinguish between theoretical science versus myth? Since she is appraised of the feminist critique of science, none of the latter options seem likely, but what Jackson's value guidelines are, remains unclear.

Though coming from the Left, in some respects, Jackson's contribution to ecological debate is on a par with Bramwell and the Contrarians. She queries whether Green, ecofeminist, and indigenous resistances are really politically progressive and sustains her position by caricature of ecocentric politics. This, apparently rejects self-determination, scientism and instrumentalism while promoting sexual essentialism, myth-making and subsistence utopias. On the other hand, Jackson takes 'the market' at face value, and actually defends employment of women in transnational corporations as liberating. In a classic piece of structuralist mystification redolent of the seventies, she concludes: 'The debates about women's experience, in devel-

<sup>25</sup> Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths', p. 139.

<sup>26</sup> Examples of a feminist standpoint epistemology can be found in Ariel Salleh, 'On the Dialectics of Signifying Practice', *Thesis Eleven*, nos. 5-6, 1982, pp. 72-84; Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, Ithaca 1986.

oping countries, of both Structural Adjustment Programmes and the Green Revolution show that women enter markets as gendered subjects and the outcomes depend on other forms of identity and positioning.'<sup>27</sup>

### Socialism and Reflexivity

Of course, social theorists must always temper their universalizing claims. There are local differences between feminisms, just as there are multiple socialisms. Again, there are local variations in how women and men relate to each other. Even so, empirical studies show gender oppression more often present than absent, regardless of culture. Jackson knows this, which is why her passion is to bring gender analysis into environmentalism and ensure that women's fragile gains are not sacrificed by Green politics in favour of non-human species. As evinced by masculinist responses in the ecofeminism-deep ecology debate, this remains a very worthwhile project. At the same time, though, her essay expresses intolerance of women's own ecological theorizations. From an ecofeminist point of view, the piece emits an overwhelming sense of *déjà vu*; not only well-worn arguments out for yet another run, but the gender-positioning of this critical event is all too familiar.

As far as socialist philosophy and practice goes, feminists have spent twenty years challenging its gender blindness, but the Marxist theoretical oligarchy has been slow to rethink socialism in the context of either gender or ecological crisis.<sup>28</sup> Will it lean on women comrades to deal with these matters? And to what ends? Consider the title 'Radical Environmental Myths'. What function does it serve but to massage a defensive old-school socialist demeanour in the face of an upstart ecology; while its subtitle 'A Gender Perspective' offers soothing self-congratulation. The irony is that, as Jackson's feminism tilts at ecocentrics who oppose humanist chauvinism, her text may speak the male chauvinism of a socialist Left. To say the least, NLR's publication of Jackson's hasty attack on ecofeminist theorists casts a cloud over the gender reflexivity of both editors and author. 'Positioning' indeed!

The value of Marx's contribution to human self-understanding remains beyond question even as we move to a post-humanist perceptive. Any bio-ethic will need to be complemented by a materialist politics—though clearly not the disembodied legacy of a ventriloquist socialism. Radical ecology deserves theory that is gendered, pushes past single-issue movement thinking, and past the natural law of economic determination 'in the last instance'. But before that lonely hour arrives, will socialists turn their caring hearts to a fair assessment of ecofeminism and how it draws Green, socialist, feminist and indigenous struggles together?

<sup>27</sup> Jackson, 'Radical Environmental Myths', p. 131.

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most succinct record of the British feminist encounter with socialism is Sheila Robotham et al, *Beyond the Fragments*, London 1979; in the USA, Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution*, Boston 1981 recorded the experience and in Australia, it was carried by socialist journals like *Arena*. For exchanges between ecofeminism and socialism see Ariel Salleh, 'Ideology and Ecology', *Chain Reaction*, no. 31, 1983; 'The Politics of Representation', *Arena*, no. 91, 1990, pp. 163-9; 'Marxism and Ecofeminism: An Exchange', *Fifth Estate*, vol. 27, 1992, pp. 21-7; *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Post-modern*, London 1996, forthcoming.