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Social Ecology and 'The Man Question'

ARIEL SALLEH

Anarchist Murray Bookchin's social ecology converges with ecofeminist politics in several ways, even naming women's caring labours 'libertarian reason *par excellence*'. However, Bookchin's theory founders in practice through his rejection of what actual ecofeminist voices have to say. Ironically, when Bookchin's companion Janet Biehl takes up the case for social ecology against ecofeminists, a deep fracture between Biehl and Bookchin's assumptions about humanity and nature surfaces, revealing ecofeminism to be closer to Bookchin's social ecology than is Biehl's liberal feminism.

Persistently Exorcising Her Powers

After the Marxist doldrums of the 1970s, anarchist Murray Bookchin's essays in *Toward an Ecological Society* offered an exhilarating release for some women activists stymied by unrelenting economism and male Left hierarchies.¹ For Bookchin, Marxism had become 'an ideology of naked power, pragmatic efficiency and social centralisation almost indistinguishable from the ideologies of modern state capitalism' [1971: 92]. But more importantly, Bookchin's social ecology, born but yet unnamed as politics, focused on ecological crisis and its social origins just as ecofeminists were beginning to do. Among would-be fathers of ecopolitical thought, Bookchin alone intuited the ecofeminist connection: an understanding that men's oppression of nature and of woman are fundamentally interlinked. As he wrote in *The Ecology of Freedom*: 'The subjugation of her nature and its absorption into the nexus of patriarchal morality forms the *archetypal* act of domination that ultimately gives rise to man's imagery of a subjugated nature [1991: 121 (*italics added*)]. Bookchin's impressive history of hierarchy coincides with this key ecofeminist idea in a number of places, despite an assertion that gerontocracy was the earliest social stratification.

The following passage demonstrates the tension between gerontocracy and patriarchy as causal principles in his work, yet it ultimately favours

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patriarchal authority as prior. Why, after all, this concern with the specific relation of father and son? 'Until well into the sixth century B.C., the son "had duties but no rights; while his father lived, he was a perpetual minor". In its classical form, patriarchy *implied* male gerontocracy, not only the rule of the males over females' [Bookchin, 1991: 120 (*italics added*)]. Of course, the question which form of hierarchy came first historically – gerontocracy or patriarchy – is fairly scholastic and can never be determined with any methodological certainty. We could settle for recognising a relative autonomy of the two faces of domination perhaps? On the other hand, it might be argued that the motive behind formation of a gerontocracy was itself a patriarchal need to secure resources for sexual gratification by less vibrant older males – for example, rule by ageing females is never the issue. Besides, while older men may use cunning over males and females of all ages, younger men in most societies threaten physical violence over both men and women. Then again, even without brute force, Bookchin notes, women are physically disadvantaged by their reproductive capacities.

If classical patriarchy was based on the subjection of sons, we scarcely seem to have moved beyond it. Older men sending younger men off to war has the double benefit of reducing sexual competition and protecting their accumulated property. The inequities of capitalism can be seen as a precise transmutation of a dynamic where young people, women and outsiders, are kept impoverished and powerless by the corporate greed of a few big men, usually but not necessarily in the over-fifty age bracket. Looking at which system of domination has a tighter hold on our lives today, it has to be said that patriarchal power, embodied in capitalist economics and state bureaucracies, is certainly more glamorous and pervasive than gerontocracy. In addition, a handful of liberated women reaching positions of authority in these institutions does nothing to change that structural domination.

If the Oedipal logic of totem and taboo still seems to apply, Bookchin's formulation, unlike that of Freud or fellow anarchist Kropotkin, is far removed from any social-instinct theory. Social ecologists, like ecofeminists, understand that power relations develop by historical convention. Bookchin sounds especially ecofeminist when he writes that woman was the first victim, her oppression being reinforced by appearance of the civil sphere: 'Woman became the *archetypal* Other of morality, ultimately the human embodiment of its warped image of evil ... the male still opposes his society to woman's nature, his capacity to produce commodities to her ability to reproduce life, his rationalism to her "instinctual" drives ...' [1991: 120]. Again, he acknowledges that it is the material productivity of women everywhere that makes life possible. Here, he supports a model of gender exploitation that precedes both slavery and the class-divided society of Marx. Bookchin suggests that denigration of

women's 'nature' has been an all but universal phenomenon and notes how unremitting hatred of women's 'inquisitiveness' reaches from pygmy Africa to ancient Greece. Her posture must always reflect renunciation and modesty.

Even so, the masculine will to power is not quenched:

A gnawing sense of inferiority and incompleteness stamps every aspect of the newly emergent male morality ... It is utterly impossible to understand why meaningless wars, male boastfulness, exaggerated political rituals, and a preposterous elaboration of civil institutions engulf so many different, even tribal, societies without recognising how ... the male is over-active and 'over-burdened' by his responsibilities – often because there is so little for him to do in primordial communities and even in many historical societies [Bookchin, 1991: 122].

While, in an enlightened world, Hobbes' social contract appears to abnegate the patriarchal self, in fact it simply sublimates the roles of fathers, priests, and warriors. The modern state comes to colonise and absorb every facet of daily life, replacing custom and loyalty by depersonalised law and bureaucratic supports. As Bookchin reminds us: 'the entire ensemble is managed like a business' [1990: 182]. Thanks to Locke and his brothers, the possibility of vigorous participatory democracy gives way under bourgeois capitalism to representative government by a mostly male propertied elite. Social production becomes mineralisation of the earth, and civil society a fragmented mass that now celebrates its identity in the electronic glitz of the shopping mall.

Against this postmodern condition, Bookchin pits a fundamentally ecofeminist vision by outlining what he sees as the feminine contribution to civilisation. This contribution, created in the communication between mother and child, lays out the very foundations of consociation and thought. While Bookchin's discussion tends to use unexamined, some would say essentialist notions of gender, ecofeminists break with patriarchal dualisms by inviting men to join this radical nurturant activity. Social ecology points to such labour as a very specific form of reason – one 'concealed by the maudlin term mother love'. It is a rationality of otherness, grounded in symbiosis. Consistent with his modernist framework, Bookchin calls this nurture an 'earlier' model of rationality, but clearly it is a skill current among women care workers across many cultures. Further, as I have argued in an ecofeminist critique of deep ecology, the apparent invisibility of techniques and values that make up this paradigm of sociability is holding back ecopolitical change: '... if women's lived experience were ... given legitimation in our culture, it could provide an immediate 'living' social

basis for the alternative consciousness which [radical men are] trying to formulate as an abstract ethical construct' [Salleh, 1984: 340]. Such a move would also further the gender revolution by de-stabilising fixed masculine and feminine work roles.

Compared with the bourgeois ethic of egoism, Bookchin contends that the sensibility women learn in caring labour expresses

a rationality of de-objectification that is almost universal in character, indeed, a resubjectivization of experience that sees the 'other' within a logical nexus of mutuality. The 'other' becomes the active component that it always has been in natural and social history, not simply the 'alien' and alienated that it is in Marxian theory and the 'dead matter' that it is in classical physics [1991: 306].

Without any sense of appropriation, Bookchin claims the mutualism of feminine labour and its techniques as the practice of libertarian reason *par excellence*. In the light of this pervasive force, it is curious, then, that he should wonder how to define the historical subject [1991: 139]. Nevertheless, he goes on to reflect that what passes for civilisation now is precisely the undoing of this empathic capacity in order for individual adults – that is, men and a handful of so-called emancipated women – can take part in patriarchal institutions: 'growing up comes to mean growing away from a maternal, domestic world of mutual support, concern, and love (*a venerable and highly workable society in its own right*) into one made shapeless, unfeeling and harsh. To accommodate humanity to war, exploitation, political obedience, and rule involves the undoing not only of human 'first nature' as an animal but also of human "second nature" ...' [1991: 305].

Based on such destructive de-socialisation, Western pretensions to personal autonomy become psychologically hollow and unsustainable, for their very substrate is vitiated. Women, meanwhile, are obliged to forge a cunning accommodation with patriarchal requirements and feminists must exercise a double duplicity. Bookchin contrasts Hopi Indian peoples (and we can recall the tale of Margaret Mead's Samoans) whose luck it was to carry their socialisation for reciprocity into adult life. According to social ecology, the organic evolution of humans (Eurocentred ones, he means) towards awareness of their 'free nature' demands recovery of this repressed sociability – a recollection as Frankfurt Marxists would say; a renewal of the semiotic, according to poststructuralist Julia Kristeva. Social ecology, ecofeminism, critical Marxism and semanalysis converge at this turn, despite Bookchin's desire to differentiate his work from other radicalisms.

Nevertheless, both social ecology and critical theory posit men's control of woman as pivotal to the establishment of hierarchy. The implication is

that being less sullied by the commodity society, women are potential agents of liberation. But, as noted, Bookchin does not explore this line further, preferring a pluralist analysis. Accordingly, *The Ecology of Freedom* reads:

The dialectical unfolding of hierarchy has left in its wake an ages-long detritus of systems of domination involving ethnic, gendered, age, vocational, urban-rural, and many other forms of dominating people, indeed, an elaborate system of rule that economic 'class analyses' and strictly antistatist approaches do not clearly reveal [1991: xxv].

Bookchin urges us to understand the complex interaction between these various stratifications, but in doing so, he does not seem to have assimilated the implications of his generous proto-ecofeminist insight. For once the complementarity of otherness, so well understood by women care-givers and reciprocity-based indigenous communities is overtaken by self-interested calculation, the sexually fetishised dualisms of the Eurocentric patriarchy become a complementarity of domination.

Bookchin ultimately bypasses his proposition that men's historical power over women is archetype of this polarising style, and so he loses the hidden political opportunity for actualising the free nature expressed in women's labours. Instead, and in seeming self contradiction, his writing turns derisive of contemporary women's struggle: 'It will do us little good to contend that all the evils in the world stem from a monolithic "patriarchy", for example, or that hierarchy will wither away once women or putative female values replace "male supremacy" ...' [1991: xxv].² After long passages spelling out the liberatory significance of women's nurturant activities in his philosophy of dialectical naturalism, Bookchin mocks 'putative feminine values'. Then, in the face of his own ambivalence, he projects ecofeminism as irrational.

What is he saying here? It seems that woman as glorified object of man's contemplative gaze is one thing, but the feminine voice itself becomes a different matter. When can the subaltern speak?³ As we have seen, in dealing with women who dare to speak as women, a number of ecopolitical writers adopt defensively rejecting postures. So much so that discursive strategies such as denial and omission, refusing to connect, projection and personalisation, caricature and trivialisation, discredit and invalidation, ambivalence and appropriation, are now familiar responses to women who presume to enter the masculine domain of theory. Given Bookchin's path-breaking recognition of men's domination of women as archetypal, could the politics of social ecology itself be compromised by the man question?

Domestic Agendas

In 1991, Janet Biehl, intimate companion of Murray Bookchin, published a small book called *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*. This set out the terms of a long overdue political debate between social ecology and the spiritually oriented culturalist ecofeminism prevalent in the USA.⁴ The tension between these two ideological tendencies became clear at the first National Green Gathering in Amherst, Massachusetts in June 1987. Eco-anarchist Bookchin was a key speaker at this event, and spiritual ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak, a mother of green politics, was another. As the nascent US green movement struggled for self definition, a sense of competing hegemonies hung over it like a cloud. Some described it as a collision between New England rationalists versus California mystics. Spretnak was also identified with deep ecology – another West Coast approach to green thought and total anathema to Bookchinites.

The subsequent rise of a Left Green Network and Youth Greens organised by Howie Hawkins near Bookchin's home base in Vermont was another practical outcome of the Amherst encounter – a concerted effort by social ecologists and others on the Left to ensure that an adequate social analysis would inform the development of green politics in the USA.⁵ A further issue introduced by the East v. West Coast divide at the first US National Green Gathering was a tacit struggle over the body of ecofeminism. Where should it belong? Was it to affirm the life-giving potency of woman and nature through ritual celebration of the earth goddess? Or was ecofeminism to walk hand in hand with social ecology, helped along by Chiah Heller and Ynestra King, teachers at Bookchin's Institute for Social Ecology? An Ecofeminist Seminar hosted by the Institute of Social Ecology in July 1994 drawing together women from all regions of North America played out the residue of that agenda.

From the perspective of women in an international ecofeminist community now some 20 years old these ideological schisms are very much a product of social conditions domestic to the USA. Ecofeminists in Scandinavia or Australia, for example, enter a political scene where broadly socialist ideas have currency even in establishment circles; where the famous L word so precious to American progressives is even seen as conservative; and where politics itself is felt to be a spiritual commitment. The mainstream community temper in the wider Western world tends to be secular humanist, too, rather than shaped by religiosity as it is in the USA. In India or Venezuela, ecofeminism encounters different conditions again. For the fact is, that the problems facing green activists around the world, including ecofeminist activists, vary with the unique historical trajectory of their region.

This fact indicates a serious limitation in Biehl's *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics*, for that re-think depends on omission and a falsely universalised notion of what ecofeminism is. Her ecofeminist textual sources were Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* (1978), Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980), Charlene Spretnak's *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* (1982) and *The Spiritual Dimension of Green Politics* (1987), Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987), Starhawk's *Truth or Dare* (1988), Andrée Collard's *Rape of the Wild* (1989), and essays from anthologies such as Plant's *Healing the Wounds* (1989) and Diamond and Orenstein's *Reweaving the World* (1990). While Biehl claims to engage with a movement, her bibliography deals only with North American material. The upshot of this inadequate research base is that ecofeminists in the wider international community have their political contribution marginalised. Yet, equally unfair, they have to wear criticism that does not necessarily apply to their articulations of ecofeminism. Biehl comments somewhere in her book that the US education system is notably remiss in conveying a sense of history and geographic relativity to its people. Clearly, this serves the impoverished imperialist consciousness in many ways, but it is sad to see this same limitation reflected in radical American writing as well.

Of course, the mis-match between Biehl's rather home-grown project and the global reach of its title, may have issued from publication editors with a keen eye for commodity export. The political impact of that decision will nevertheless continue to ripple outward into the international scene. To take an example: on the Island Continent where green parties first began, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* has been embraced by Trotskyists who operate under a Green Alliance banner, and used as a means of invalidating the work of independent ecofeminist activists.⁶ These Left cadres, never much troubled by ideological consistency when scoring a political point, are too unread to be inhibited by the message of Bookchin's *Listen Marxist!* (Perhaps the time is right for Murray to look at a revised, updated version of his earlier essay? A number of ecofeminist activists and scholars on our fatal shore would value his efforts.) It is not Biehl's fault that others have used her writing in this opportunistic way, although there is a salutary lesson in taking stock of the political landscape on all fronts before setting out to attack potential allies. The other lesson in all this is a reminder that history is made up of internal contradictions – ecofeminism having no prerogative on them.

Now, because ecofeminist politics grows out of a plurality of social contexts, it will have many complexions. Biehl asserts that it is marred by 'massive internal contradictions'. But one cannot expect the spontaneous organic voice of a worldwide democratic groundswell such as ecofeminism to show the same degree of philosophic grooming as a statement such as

social ecology, born of the pen of a singular charismatic figure. Despite differences among ecofeminists, there is always a common strand to women's experiences – things shared by dint of the patriarchal ascription of womanhood, and things beyond that. The knowledge of this unity is empowering to women and a delight. Women are discovering themselves as re/sisters outside the divisive legacies of patriarchal capitalism, colonialism, even Marxism and some green ideologies. In a global context women, 53 per cent of the world's population, are the largest minority group. Never to forget that it is women who put in 65 per cent of the world's work for ten per cent of the world's pay. This is what marks women out as a significant political category – not an essentialist fabrication as antifeminists want to claim. But *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* forgets this material fact, preoccupied as it is with the status of political ideas. In this respect, New England rationalists display a bourgeois idealism equal to that of the West Coast spiritual feminists who bother it so.

Bearing in mind that US ecofeminism is Biehl's focus, she expresses disappointment in a literature that '[fails to] draw upon the best of social theory and meld it with radical concepts in ecology to produce a genuine anti-hierarchical, enlightened, and broadly oppositional movement' [1991: 1]. She is disturbed by ecofeminists who seem to situate themselves 'outside' the emancipatory legacy of Western – read Eurocentric – political culture. Not surprisingly, she offers Bookchin's social ecology as the most promising model in this legacy for ecofeminists and other greens to espouse. Now Biehl is rightly concerned, in that there is no well developed Left ecofeminist account among the US texts she addresses. But she is wrong to go on to conclude that ecofeminism as such lacks this analysis or, more seriously, that it lacks the intellectual resources for arriving at the same. German ecofeminist Maria Mies' study *Patriarchy and Accumulation* (1987) provides a coherent analysis of an internationally predatory capitalist system and of how it uses patriarchal violence on women and nature to secure economic ends. Mies steps outside the Eurocentric legacy to look for an empirically grounded feminine voice, then brings this voice into dialogue with the basic presuppositions of Marxism itself. Vandana Shiva's postcolonial *exposé* of development in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (1989) is a further example. Other ecofeminist positions again have developed from the interplay of gendered living, environmental struggle, and intensive study of dialectical philosophies. This scarcely represents a turning away from social theory, as Biehl charges.

More to the point, Biehl does not seem to recognise that it is patriarchal attitudes that put women's knowledges and feminine values outside of reason – a long established procedure and one that she herself now partakes of. But what is important for ecofeminists is that loss of women's wisdoms

and skills through this marginalisation has devastating social and ecological impacts. Perhaps more than a double irony is involved when Bookchin reminds us that: 'In a civilisation that devalues nature, she is the "image of nature" ... Yet woman haunts this male "civilisation" with a power that is more than archaic or atavistic. Every male-oriented society *must persistently exorcise her ancient powers ...*' [1991: 121]. Thus, Merchant has demonstrated how the rise of the European scientific hegemony went hand in hand with a systematic elimination of knowledgeable women healers as witches. Mies documents how their property was appropriated by executioners finding its way into the bureaucratic coffers of what has grown in to the nation state. Considerable booty was to be had from an estimated 12 million women tortured to death. Before long, the trajectories of state and science became interwoven with capitalism. Today, we witness successful capture of the knowledge industry by corporate interests – masculinist enterprise in yet another guise – and Shiva points out how women's centuries-old agricultural expertise is displaced in India by the import of so-called development: the advanced dust-bowl-technologies perfected by Western scientific men.

Dichotomies: Nature/Culture; Body/Mind; Private/Public

Biehl is not well read in feminist epistemology and so misses the deeper implications of ecofeminist critiques of patriarchal politics and science. Women's approaches to making knowledge are not simply weak and irrational, but positively committed to principles of participation, embodiment, connectedness and wholism.⁷ Conversely, the Eurocentric patriarchal legacy from religion to science, exorcises nature, body and self as contamination. The nature/culture split is replicated in the rationalist dichotomy between body and mind, and echoed in turn by the political device of separating private from public sphere. For many ecofeminists, these binary representations are symptomatic of masculine struggles for independence – to be understood as transcendence from the originary body of the mother. The bodies of lovers and wives bring back the sense of need and dependency, the terror of reabsorption, dissolution. Rousseau's *Emile* is telling in this respect. If women were not kept restrained by modesty 'the result would soon be the ruin of both [sexes], and mankind would perish by the means established for preserving it ... Men would finally be [women's] victims ... All people perish from the disorder of women' [Pateman, 1988: 97–9]. Women's passion is nature, which must be controlled and (note) transcended, if social order is to be maintained.

In contrast to the simple pleasures of immanence contained in women's various labours, Eurocentric history shows hegemonic masculinity as a

defensive ego-oriented system, engorged with transcendent projects such as monotheism, global empire, scientific mastery and the cult of Reason. Carol Pateman was early to conclude that such institutions originate in sublimation of men's fear of women's otherness: 'Men have denied significance to women's unique bodily capacity, have appropriated it, and transmuted it into masculine political genesis' [1988: 216]. At any rate, it is no surprise to find masculinist thinkers railing against an immanence which tells of our human embeddedness in nature or more recently, railing against ecofeminists who are said to collapse mind into body. What ecofeminists are actually insisting on is restoring acceptance of the organic flow between body and mind – the link that Eurocentric men so compulsively check. This is an existential prerequisite to unmaking the destructive nature/culture split. Biehl, on the other hand, by reading ecofeminism literally back into the body, unwittingly sides with unreconstructed misogynist attitudes which, since Aristotle if not before, have tried to contain women by association with nature. But we are no longer living in such unreasoned times. Ecofeminist arguments address a postmodern conjuncture, where subaltern voices have new currency.

By looking at the relation of men and women to the natural body and its metaphors, ecofeminism is paving the way for an ecological ethic based on a profound re-thinking of the human condition. Susan Griffin puts it aptly: 'We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies ... For we see ourselves and we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature. Nature weeping. Nature speaking of nature to nature' [1978: 226]. There is little about this statement that Bookchin should have difficulty with – unless it is the speaker's gender. Compare *The Ecology of Freedom* where he describes nature as 'writing its own philosophy and ethics'. For, 'from the biochemical responses of a plant to its environment to the most willful actions of a scientist in the laboratory, a common bond of primal subjectivity inheres in the very organisation of matter itself' [Bookchin, 1991: 276].

Speaking from a position of masculine privilege, Bookchin can afford to be less inhibited on the question of our human relation to nature than is Biehl. So, comfortably reviving Kropotkin in tandem with Bloch's neo-Marxist concept of co-productivity, he theorises that: 'Labour's "metabolism" with nature cuts both ways, so that nature interacts with humanity to yield the actualisation of their common potentialities in the natural and social worlds' [Bookchin, 1991: 33].⁸ In contrast, Biehl's old style patriarchally identified feminist contempt for the body and nature becomes confusion in discussion of the nature/culture nexus. She agrees with ecofeminism that men and women are not ontological opposites but rather differentiations in human potential. But her antagonism to social

constructionists means that she cannot concede this potential as discursively mediated. In other words, lacking a dialectical understanding of links between nature and nurture she is forced back into the very reductionism that she would like to fault ecofeminism with.

Losing sight of Bookchin's acknowledgment of women's mutualism as libertarian reason *par excellence*, Biehl asserts that if feminine otherness is put forward as a political identity, then ecofeminists 'root themselves outside of Western culture altogether' [1991: 15]. Yet how else is the Eurocentric patriarchal tendency to essentialise masculinity as humanity to be negated without such an antithesis? Leaving the dialectical naturalism of *The Ecology of Freedom* aside, Biehl shapes her argument with ecofeminism squarely within the classic binarisms of liberal politics. In consequence, she characterises the ecofeminist argument that women and men are in and of nature as anti-Enlightenment and regressive. In fact, ecofeminists are like deep ecologists in endorsing a continuum between human and natural spheres, but they are even more like those social ecologists who argue dialectically that human and non-human nature is simultaneously continuum and disjunction.

Biehl's support for Bookchin's rejection of autonomous ecofeminist voices also adopts the classical distinction between private and public as a political given. Hence, the text of *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* echoes the terror that Hegel and Rousseau had of women's subversive potential: here, feminine piety versus public law represents the supreme opposition in ethics. That opposition is played out today in debates over the adequacy of caring as a feminist ethical principle. Again, forgetting Bookchin's writing on women's practice of libertarian reason, Biehl dismisses ecofeminists such as Plant, Diamond and Orenstein for seeking 'to extend the very concept of "women's sphere" as home to embrace and absorb the community as a whole' [1991: 132]. While she agrees that ecofeminism coincides with the communitarian emphasis of social ecology, and with the ecological struggle of rural women in the Two-Thirds World, Biehl is not happy to reinforce this convergence in green thought. Rather, she remarks that 'decentralised community, seen abstractly without due regard to democracy and confederalism, has the potential to become regressive ... Homophobia, anti-Semitism, and racism as well as sexism, may be part of a parochial "communitarian ethos" [1991: 134].

In light of recent feminist political theory, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* comes down inappropriately on King's critique of a masculinist political legacy that is 'founded on repudiation of the organic, the female, the tribal, and particular ties between people'.⁹ Biehl calls this 'convoluted thinking and atavism with a vengeance, especially if one considers that the Western democratic tradition produced a consciousness of *universal*

freedom that ultimately opened the public sphere to women ...' [1991: 136].¹⁰ Ecofeminists do not deny some ideological inspiration in the North's universalism so-called, though re/sisters in the South may have another view of the origins of their emancipatory struggle. The real issue though, is the question of why our Eurocentric democratic tradition has so consistently failed to deliver. Twenty years after Second Wave feminism began, the leading nation of the Free World still has not accorded women legal possession of their own bodies. Hence the work of Mary O'Brien, Hilikka Pietila, Shiva, and others to diagnose the source of this fraternal incapacity. To repeat: it is not ecofeminists, but the Western legacy itself, that puts women outside. Biehl worries about possible loss of political objectivity in ecofeminist communal dealings based on any feminine principle, but perhaps she should examine her own stance. For as she herself notes: 'In any democratic polity worthy of the name, one is accountable to one's fellow citizens [including sisters], not only to one's friends and lovers' [Biehl, 1991: 153].

Eco-anarchist Bookchin rightly regrets the arrival of factory production which killed off the principle of usufruct and self reliance in community life. In related vein, he opposes the disempowering effect of representative government by an elected elite. Councils and political parties simply mirror the bureaucratic state in his view. As Biehl relates it: 'Social ecology distinguishes between statecraft, as a system of dealing with the public realm by means of professionalised administrators and their legal monopoly on violence, on the one hand, and politics, as the management of the community on a grass roots democratic and face-to-face level by citizen bodies ...' [1991: 150]. Bookchin recognises, but does not dwell on the role of a restless, transcendent masculinity in undermining its own political institutions. His lack of systematic gender analysis equally affects his treatment of usufruct – a favourite economic theme, referring to communal availability of resources by those who need them, as opposed to ownership or exchange based on the monetary principle of equivalence. Now usufruct is precisely what continues to mark the daily rounds of a global majority of women, excluded as they are from the commodity society. Pietila's account of the pink economy among Finland's domestic workers or Shiva's North Indian forest dwellers are clear illustrations. Here is 'an immediate living social basis for the alternative consciousness which [radical men are] trying to formulate as an abstract ethical construct' [Salleh, 1984: 340]. But social ecology remains too compromised by traditional binarisms to make connections of this sort.

The same problem contaminates its political vision based on a rejuvenated Athenian model. *Polis* was, and is, premised on a separation of culture from nature and, as such, is ill equipped to steer an ecological future.

The divide between *polis* and *oikos* was also a gendered and ethnic stratification, as women and slaves were excluded from citizenship. The gender stratification in turn, reinforced the separation of humanity and nature by compounding men with culture and women with nature. With the advent of the market, *polis* effectively split *oikos* apart into economy on the one hand, and ecology on the other. And so *oikos* as economics was detached from its grounding in daily needs, breaking the rational tie between household and sustainability. Further, *polis* implies severance of its own ethical universalist orientation from *oikos*, supposedly limited to particularistic ends. However, feminism now teaches us that political and personal ends are intrinsically tied, while environmental crisis teaches that we split economy from ecology at our peril. Biehl's *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* states that 'the essence of democracy is precisely its latent capacity to cut across particular, gender and other cultural lines' [1991: 149]. Not only is democracy even in the twentieth century still latent, but the cultural line that Biehl does not mention here is that which cuts humanity off from the rest of nature. As we move towards a green understanding, it is essential to address the full gamut of Eurocentric domination.¹¹ Ecofeminism, like deep ecology, is concerned about the oppression of all life forms.

It goes without saying that against the dreary, alienating, exploitative society of transnational corporate capital, Bookchin's Rousseau-style neighbourhood assemblies and confederation of city states offers an inspiring alternative. Emerging first as land trusts and shadow councils, they could mobilise communities around reforms, gradually gaining legitimation and at the same time fostering autonomous co-ops, organic gardens and market places.¹² But as deep ecological greens and most ecofeminists believe, a real political shift means letting go of the culture versus nature polarity. A regressive humanity/nature split is certainly a domain-assumption of the Eurocentric political legacy that Biehl's conventional liberal feminism wishes to preserve. And although Bookchin's neo-Hegelian image of nature contemplates a continuum of life potentials rather than dualism, he also speaks of consciousness as delineating a specifically human realm separate from the rest of nature. In this rationalist vein, *Rethinking Ecofeminist Politics* would have women place themselves with men over and above nature. By contrast, ecofeminist politics enlists men to give up their originary fears of embeddedness; to join women in reaffirming their place as part of nature; and to formulate new social practices and institutions in line with that perception.

Conclusion

The gulf between Bookchin's radical, if occasional, celebration of women's mutualistic rationality and Biehl's liberal disdain of feminine

values is a profound theoretic fracture within social ecology. It is plain from women's ecological actions across the globe – the 300-year-old tradition of Chipko tree huggers, the peasant mothers of Seveso, Australian Koori women anti-base activists – that it is empathic nurture rather than any sophisticated social theory that guides these sound and genuinely universalised political stands. Most women in general, and ecofeminists in particular, do not have great difficulty applying concern to strangers and others outside their immediate kin community. Mutuality as an ethical basis is no more fragile than the objective basis of democratic rights legitimated by the polity of men. In fact, as ecofeminist Marti Kheel has observed in an environmental ethics context, the emotional substrate of caring is prerequisite for a rights-based ethic to function at all – an invisible feminine underbelly, whose social labour makes possible the public world of fraternal relations [1985].

Biehl's primary misgiving over ecofeminist 'immanence' is that its ontology is cyclic rather than progressive and she feels that this goes against a transcendent liberatory politics. But the logic of ecology is also cyclic, which is why human intentionality cutting a linear path to its unreasoned ends leaves so much destruction behind. Moreover, looking at green priorities, a trajectory of pure subjective choice is rationalist illusion – an embourgeoisement of freedom, to borrow Bookchin's insightful phrase. The absolute freedom of some is always enjoyed at the expense of others. Freedom was an important piece of ideology at a time when the classical liberal notion of human agency occurred to the North. But democratic citizenship, really fraternal emancipation, was only ever gained at the cost of women tacitly absorbed in social provisioning through the hidden sexual contract.

On a global scale, the freedom that men and a few women in a postmodern commodity culture believe they enjoy still rests on the labours of an underclass of women domestics, food growers and silicon slaves [Salleh, 1994]. As Commoner put it: there is no such thing as a free lunch. We live in a material world and freedom has material parameters. Beyond women's labours stands the resource substrate of nature, next in the chain of appropriation. In order to arrive at a green society, where gender equity is global and a sustainable reciprocity is established with nature, we may have to rethink the unbridled Eurocentric fetish for the transcendent. True freedom involves limits and an acceptance of our embodied condition. Without awareness of this, the most enlightened citizenry is as free as infant children are.

NOTES

1. On p.15 of the 1979 Introduction to *Toward an Ecological Society*, feminism is commended for recognising the originary domination, though no woman author is cited. See also Bookchin, [1980: 40]. On p.265, Bookchin acknowledges damage done to the women's liberation movement by the Left and specifically by Marxism as bourgeois sociology.
2. Bookchin's ambivalence toward feminism is deep. In *Remaking Society*, p.64, he argues that feminists are wrong to see women as prototypical victims of hierarchy. On p.156, he notes that feminism brought an opportunity to 'existentialise' the concept of hierarchy. His further claim that feminists have drawn 'heavily from the language and literature of social ecology' in order to do this, is undocumented and patently false.
3. In connection with silencing the subaltern voices of ecofeminism, see the examination of typical defensive strategies in Salleh [1993] and for a depth analysis, Lederer [1968].
4. Bookchin's own caricature of ecofeminism can be found in *Remaking Society*, p.163. Despite his theoretical departure from Marxism and importance as a counter-cultural thinker, this text demonstrates an Old Left difficulty in understanding the link between personal and political.
5. This work has since been formalised as Principles of the Left Green Network, First Conference of the Left Greens, Ames, Iowa, 21-23 April 1989.
6. The world's first Green Party is now recognised as the United Tasmania Group, formed in March 1972, during the heady days of struggle for Lake Pedder. The New Zealand Values Party appeared one month later.
7. Compare Salleh [1982], Keller [1985], Harding [1986], Haraway [1990]. There is a useful thematic summary of feminist epistemologies in Lichtenstein [1987]. See also the foundational critiques of rationalism by Gilligan [1984], Lloyd [1984], and Irigaray [1985].
8. The reference is to Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* and Ernst Bloch's *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*.
9. This recent feminist political literature includes Okin [1979], O'Brien [1981], Hartsock [1983], Ferguson [1984], Pateman [1988] and Naffine [1990].
10. The reference is to Ynestra King's essay 'Healing the Wounds' in Diamond and Orenstein [1990].
11. Compare Salleh 1993 and *Ecofeminism as Politics: nature, Marx and the postmodern* (London: Zed Books, forthcoming).
12. Bookchin's vision of transitional practices in Chase [1991: 83-4] is especially heartening.

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