

Interview mit Ariel Salleh

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Interviewer: Christine Schickert

Technik/Transkript: Peter Rabe

Video: <http://youtu.be/bmUeNe61stM>



Prof Dr Salleh has edited and amended the interview transcript and added some additional points for clarification. A full list of her published work can be found at - www.arielsalleh.info.

Christine Schickert:

So Ariel, you started off, mainly publishing work about ecofeminism ...?

Ariel Salleh:

That's right. Technically I'm a sociologist but I always felt it important to link 'lived life' with academic work - as feminists say 'the personal is political'. My early work was with indigenous people in Australia, but I had also become a mother while still a student. Both commitments called for different kinds of political reflection. In my later work as an academic, these practical down-to-earth experiences melded with my reading and teaching of neo-marxist theory and feminist epistemology. And that led me to the idea of combining feminism with ecology.¹ - At the time, our anti-uranium struggle was a big issue - for parents because of radioactive pollution; for indigenous communities because they were displaced from home country by the activities of transnational mining companies. I had become a social justice advocate, but now I was also an ecologist.

However, I noticed on reading the US journal *Environmental Ethics* that 'the deep ecologists' - a major strand of environmental philosophy, were sensitive to the exploitation of nature but oblivious to social domination by race or gender or class. So I got involved in challenging these deep ecologists from a gender and class perspective. This debate ran on in *Environmental Ethics* for about ten years. I guess, I made a bit of a name for ecofeminism at that point. I was also early in my career, an editor of the journal *Thesis Eleven* - which is an Australian marxist journal. But I had difficulty getting marxist colleagues thinking about ecological stuff. Eventually, I moved across and helped set up the journal *Capitalism Nature Socialism* in the US. Here ecological questions would be central to any new theorization of a critical marxism. The next question was: could marxists juggle ecology and feminism at the same time?²

Another important experience shaping my sociological standpoint was the 1992 Rio Earth Summit in Brazil. This deepened my grasp of contradictions in the so-called 'development' process. Also, I began to ask how all four political movements could move as one: the feminist movement, worker's movement with marxism, ecology, and the postcolonial movement. My first book called *Ecofeminism as Politics* (1997) is actually a critique of

¹ Ariel Kay Salleh, 'On the Dialectics of Signifying Practice', *Thesis Eleven*, 1982, No. 5/6, 72-84; 'Contribution to the Critique of Political Epistemology', *Thesis Eleven*, 1984, No. 8, 23-43.

² Ariel Salleh, 'Deeper than Deep Ecology: The ecofeminist connection', *Environmental Ethics*, 6/4, 1984, 339-345; Editorial: 'Towards an Inclusive Solidarity on the Left', Symposium Ecosocialist-Ecofeminist Dialogues', *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 2006, Vol. 17, No. 4, 33-38.

existing marxist theories for failure to integrate these cutting edge social movements.³ They are now fast-forward at our time in history, with Rio 1992 reinforced at the new millennium by the World Social Forum for an alternative kind of globalization. This passage through ecological feminism has taken many twists and turns, but always with a view to integrating people's efforts to make social change.

Christine Schickert: [Does this alternative globalization movement link with 'degrowth' as discussed in Europe today?](#)

Ariel Salleh:

Interesting question! They don't really meet. They are both responses to environmental crisis. They both concern the logic of reproduction - as distinct from production. To back-track a little: my 1997 book proposed that the focus on production in classic marxist sociology should be counter-balanced with an analysis of the logic of reproduction, reproductive structures, and reproductive labour. This is the step that enables integration of the different social movements, because everybody is involved in everyday life survival, and this in turn, is embedded in ecological processes. Any theorization which doesn't link to that level of analysis is not getting to grips with our full materiality in my view. The new trans-discipline of 'political ecology' is starting to go there, and perhaps it will overtake sociology?

The World Social Forum 'movement of movements' for an alternative globalization is certainly on about maintaining 'conditions of reproduction' and so is degrowth. The latter says: 'Yes, we live in an advanced capitalist society where there are both financial and ecological crises. How can we best respond?' The degrowth response is to contract consumption and find simpler less ecologically damaging ways of dealing with human needs. But the degrowth movement is still very anthropocentric in outlook. It doesn't think with a bio-centric or ecological frame. In this sense, it replicates many assumptions that caused our problems in the first place. It needs to be deepened. By contrast, most people in the alternative globalization movement are bio-centric thinkers. Ecological feminist and indigenous groups especially, push other movements in that more holistic direction. The degrowth movement puts its faith in 'instrumental rational' mastery of the human relation with nature. This techno-mindset goes along with anthropocentrism, of course.

On the other hand, by the logic of reproduction, humans are 'nature in embodied form' - and reproductive labour facilitates ecosystem processes as a catalyst within nature itself. I call this 'meta-industrial labour' because it exists over and above industrial production. So too, meta-industrial work is about reciprocity not mastery and control. This is how I would contrast the two movements. Both are addressing the fact that thermodynamic processes in nature are damaged by western production methods. But there is a lot of work for the degrowth people to do at a cultural level. The other thing is that degrowth solutions are gender blind. There is no incorporation of critical insights from the feminist movement, nor reflection on how men and women will transcend traditional roles in a degrowth future. I don't think any histories of the degrowth movement actually acknowledge the ecological feminists and particularly German ones writing in the 1970-80s, who first argued a degrowth position. They called it the 'subsistence perspective'.

³ Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: nature, Marx, and the postmodern*. London: Zed Books, 1997.

Christine Schickert: And how does this fit into your research at the Jena Kolleg?

Ariel Salleh: As I said: I've always used my academic work as a resource for my activism, being more interested in building a just and sustainable society, than building a big career. I did a lot of work on genetic engineering, including infiltrating government committees as an ethicist to try to get some alternative thinking going! I've also worked on climate, trying to embed the interpretation of global warming in the logic of reproduction. And I strongly believe that we will not make any headway on the climate crisis unless we can work together as four grassroots movements using the logic of reproduction.⁴

Another academic application of ecological feminism occurred via the International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE) conference at New Delhi, 2006. There was not only a serious lack of gender analysis among these professionals, but the notion that you can simply put ecology and economics together to make a new discipline is naive. Martinez-Alier's Kolleg interview emphasising the inadequacy of the GDP concept is one recognition of this. Since then, I have tried to spell out the crucial differences between the discourse of economics (production) and the discourse of ecology (reproduction).⁵ The book *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice* (2009) - subtitled 'women write political ecology' - was put together by myself and a number of ecofeminist scholars, throwing down a gauntlet to ecological economics.⁶ I have to say our eco-eco friends haven't taken up the problem of gender literacy yet, but everything takes time.⁷

So what am I doing here? - This past year, the world saw Rio+20 revisit the 1992 Earth Summit. In Brazil, the government, UN, and corporation agenda was for 'a green economy'. The idea is that global financial and environment crises can be fixed at the same time by inventing 'green production' methods. I've been analyzing the internal contradictions of this, and in my opinion it is a holding operation to distract the public from the dual crisis.⁸ But in Jena, I've started looking at an initiative called Earth System Governance (ESG). This is an ambitious European research program, based in the Netherlands but spreading to university centers around the world. ESG considers the institutional and legal changes needed for effective political management of environmental processes - public-private partnerships, for example, or the future role of the UN. Should the UN environment program be boosted? Should environmental issues be subject to free trade requirements? It is a eurocentric approach, culturally speaking, taking for granted the high-tech lifestyle. The topic is important because the people who are designing these global political programs are designing our future.

Christine Schickert: Well thank you, very much!

⁴ Ariel Salleh, 'Organised Irresponsibility: Contradictions in the Australian Government's Strategy for GM Regulation', *Environmental Politics*, 15/2, 2006, 388-416; 'Climate Strategy: Making the Choice between Ecological Modernisation or Living Well', *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 66, 2011, 124-149.

⁵ Ariel Salleh, 'From Metabolic Rift to Metabolic Value: Reflections on Environmental Sociology and the Alternative Globalization Movement', *Organization & Environment*, 23/2, 2010, 205-219.

⁶ Ariel Salleh ed., *Eco-Sufficiency & Global Justice: Women write political ecology*. London: Pluto Press, 2009.

⁷ Ariel Salleh, Mary Mellor, Katharyn Farrell, and Vandana Shiva, 'How Ecofeminists Use Complexity in Ecological Economics' in K. Farrell, S. van den Hove, and T. Luzzati eds., *Beyond Reductionism*. London: Routledge, 2012.

⁸ Ariel Salleh, 'Green Economy or Green Utopia? Rio+20 and the Reproductive Labor Class', *Journal of World Systems Research*, 18/2, 2012, 141-145.