

# Climate Change—And The ‘Other Footprint’

Ariel Salleh<sup>1</sup>

When governments, corporate think tanks, and multilateral agencies deliberate on strategies for combating climate change, you can be sure they'll bypass one highly salient variable. Global warming causes, effects, and solutions are “sex/gendered.” Why for example, is women's ecological footprint negligible in comparison with men's? Why are women and children in every region the main victims of global warming? Why are women under-represented in climate negotiations at local, national, and international levels? Political elites and their media are complicit with this. And even activists reinforce it, since the conventional labelling of social movements disguises the fact that half of all worker, peasant, and Indigenous populations around the world are also women.<sup>2</sup> This is not only a problem for achieving coherent international climate policy. In building a path to the commons, it is important to keep in mind that preconscious gender assumptions will affect how the movement for “another globalisation” theorises itself and what strategies it chooses for getting beyond modernisation.<sup>3</sup>

## Modernity, Energy, Sex-Gender

Looking at the here and now, the gender differential (whereby boys and girls across every culture are trained into different adult behaviour

- 
- 1 Ariel Salleh is in Political Economy at the University of Sydney and an editor of *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. See also [www.ArielSalleh.net](http://www.ArielSalleh.net).
  - 2 In a typical example of this innocent oversight, Anne Peterman of the Global Justice Ecology Project writes: “Indigenous peoples and women are the traditional caretakers of the forest.” Accessed 15 June 2008 at [www.globalforestcoalition.org](http://www.globalforestcoalition.org).
  - 3 Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

models) is a big determinant of resource consumption patterns. While it is true that individual attitudes vary by class, age, and ethnicity, social norms for “masculinity and femininity” have especially marked structural impacts on energy use in everyday life and in policy formulation, for instance, under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The claim is well supported in surveys undertaken by the Women’s Environment Network (WEN) in London and by the German government funded women’s NGO—GENANET - led by Ulrike Roehr.<sup>4</sup> Another way to illustrate this systematic gender difference is through the ecological footprint measure.<sup>5</sup> As ecological feminists point out, there was a time in Africa, when women farmers provided 80 per cent of the continents’ food with minimal resource inputs and pollution outputs. Today, in parts of the global South where common land holdings are untouched by war, by neoliberal trade deals, and by technology transfers, many women still practice ecologically sound and self-reliant models of subsistence economics.<sup>6</sup>

It is often assumed that the capitalist division of labour emancipates women. But in fact, high tech economies reveal a more marked distinction between men’s and women’s time use and access to resources than subsistence economies do. A Swedish Government report shows that class notwithstanding, men’s ecological footprint in that nation is remarkably larger than women’s.<sup>7</sup> To repeat, there are always individual variations, but on average, Swedish men as a social category, are found to be big consumers of energy expensive manufactures and durable assets like houses, cars, and computers, while Swedish women are mainly purchasing weekly domestic consumption items—nature’s perishables. Women’s ecological footprint is actually smaller again, if adjusted for the fact that most are shopping for two or more other household members beside themselves.

- 
- 4 Women’s Environment Network and National Federation of Women’s Institutes, “Women’s Manifesto on Climate Change,” May 2007: <[www.wen.org.uk](http://www.wen.org.uk)> (accessed 10 May 2008); GENANET—Focal Point on Gender Justice and Sustainability: [www.genanet.de](http://www.genanet.de) (accessed 1 September 2007). Since the Bali IPCC, action has moved to the international site: Gendercc—Women for Climate Justice: <[www.gendercc.net](http://www.gendercc.net)> (accessed 10 May 2008).
  - 5 Mathias Wackernagel and William Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 1996): <[www.footprintnetwork.org](http://www.footprintnetwork.org)> (accessed 20 April 2007). This is not to suggest that advocates of the footprint indicator themselves are concerned with gender difference. When I wrote to Rethinking Progress about this in 2004, the reply was—good idea but not on our research agenda.
  - 6 Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies, *The Subsistence Perspective* (London: Zed Books, 1999).
  - 7 Gerd Johnsson-Latham, *Initial Study of Lifestyles, Consumption Patterns, Sustainable Development and Gender* (Stockholm: Swedish Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2006).

Energy use in the transport sector also reflects the way in which modern societies are structured by gender. Air travel between cities is predominantly used by men, but the pattern of intra-urban mobility is perhaps even more telling. A 2006 report commissioned by the European Parliament from a transnational consortium of academics, including the University of East London and Wuppertal Institute, points out that men in EU states tend to make trips by car for a single purpose; and over longer distances than women do.<sup>8</sup> A high sense of individualism and low awareness or concern for the environmental costs of private transport is inferred. Conversely, the EU statistics show that it is mainly women who travel by public transport or on foot. When women do use private cars, it is for multiple short journeys meeting several purposes on the one outing. The reason for women’s complex activity pattern is that even among those in the waged workforce, most undertake reproductive or domestic labour for husbands, children, or elderly parents. The double shift, as feminists call it.

Meike Spitzner, an author of the European Parliament report observes, that women’s days are given over to multi-tasking and so their transport needs are characterised by “spatio-temporal scatter.” Moreover, the time spent by women moving between one labour activity and another—say from office to kindergarten to supermarket—adds to their economic exploitation under capitalism as unpaid household care providers. This “spatio-temporal scatter” characterises reproductive labour carried out by women in both developed and “developing” regions; as sociologists say, women are socialised for contingency. But it is important not to overgeneralise sex-gender differences. Around the world, the number of childfree career women is increasing, which in turn, means that environmentally speaking, their transport footprint may become more like that of men in the waged productive sector. Even so, these “liberated” women remain a statistical minority. Generally the pattern in industrialised economies is that men have determinate job hours and simpler schedules than working women. For this reason, men could more easily make good use of public transport options; but they don’t—at least in Europe.

Again, this choice is a gendered one, having to do with structural differences in earning capacity. As socialist ecofeminists have argued over many decades now, capitalist and patriarchal systems are interlocked and mutually reinforcing.<sup>9</sup> And gender bias remains so entrenched in the international economy that women tend to be

8 European Parliament, *Women and Transport in Europe*, 2006: <[www.europarl.europa.eu/EST/download.do?file=9558](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EST/download.do?file=9558)> (accessed 10 January 2008).

9 Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale* (London: Zed Books, 1986); Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, op. cit., pp. 69-85, 150-169; Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004)

concentrated in either unpaid or lower salaried work, and even when professional women perform the same jobs as men, their wages are lower. Thus, it is mainly men who have money available for purchasing big status cars, as well as time available for leisure pursuits. Here—in so called developed and “developing” worlds alike—men are seeking high energy consumption recreations involving motorbikes, golf courses, computerised entertainments, or speedboats. Under capitalism, speed, technology, and indeed war, are associated with the psychology of masculine prowess, to such an extent that one might say that the oil crisis is sex-gender driven as much as driven by class interests. Mainstream environmentalist Jeffrey Sachs’ inadvertently illustrates this imbalance in gender priorities when he notes that “US government funding for renewable energy technologies (solar, wind, geothermal, ocean, and bio-energy) totaled a meager \$239 million, or just three hours of defense spending.”<sup>10</sup> But as we shall see, even when renewables do appear on the agenda, the focus on technological solutions, is itself a gendered phenomenon.

## Internalising vs. Externalising Responsibility

By contrast, due to the time consuming double shift of work and home, women’s leisure footprint is all but non-existent. Today, globalised economic scarcity and ecological stress extract more time than ever from women’s lives. But under pressure, they are found to meet their reproductive tasks with fewer resources by using good organisation and time management. This “internalised” response to environmental conditions contrasts with the accepted public political practice of “externalising” or displacing problems on to less powerful sections of the community.<sup>11</sup> For example, governments routinely locate waste disposal sites in poor neighbourhoods or on Indigenous land; or subsidise water use by factories, while taxing householders for it. Again, politicians in the economic North, externalise the costs of their high pollution lifestyle decisions on to countries in the South. There are many ways of doing this, but one is to offer incentives for converting food growing land across to biofuels.

Most neoliberal mitigation options are based on “externalisation”: and market based solutions like carbon offsets and emissions trading simply serve private entrepreneurs. They shift costs by social means. But costs can also be displaced “materially” by technology. The EU

---

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, “Reinventing Energy,” *The Guardian*, 22 April 2008: <[www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)> (accessed 10 May 2008).

<sup>11</sup> For speculation on the deeper psychosexual dynamic of this “othering” or 1/0 logic in Western culture, see: Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, pp. 35-52.

men interviewed about solutions to environmental problems clearly preferred “end-of-pipe” approaches to countering global warming. However, given that every such engineered remedy requires yet other technologies to manufacture it, and consumes a cradle to grave chain of human and natural resources along the way, the end of pipe solution is ethically—and thermodynamically—another form of “deferred responsibility.”

As GENANET notes, while women readily adjust their own energy consumption habits, far too many men across the class divide accept humanly risky responses to climate change like nuclear power, or ecologically untested solutions like ocean sequestration. This high tech tunnel vision is encouraged by the fact that the impacts of industrial growth are often uncounted economic facts, which become “social”—as “externalities” for women to pick up. In the case of nuclear spills, for instance, it is women who cope with the biological and economic costs of nursing deformed babies or relatives with radiation induced leukaemias. Such experiences help to explain why women resist risky technologies, and why they have been quick to recognise the urgency of global warming. As radical feminists have taught us: “the personal is political!”

But women’s precautionary attitudes are not only focused on their families. A survey by the Women’s Environment Network reveals:

80% of women are very concerned about climate change as an important issue and 75% are apprehensive that government action to tackle climate change will not be taken soon enough. Women are also very concerned about the effects of climate change on future generations (85%), the poor (81%), and on plant, marine and animal life (81%), the impact of more flooding, drought and extreme weather (81%), water and food shortages (81%) and habitat destruction (80%).<sup>12</sup>

The asymmetry of learned gender norms and responsibilities and the skills and values that result from gendered labours, are found as much in the “developing” South as in the North. Whether housewives, peasants, or Indigenous gatherers, women are profoundly concerned about ecological degradation. They have a long history of initiating neighbourhood ecology campaigns.<sup>13</sup> Now, a global cohort of women is insisting that international policy planners and activists start thinking about gender justice and environmental sustainability together.

---

12 WEN Manifesto cites UK public opinion polls by Emap Advertising in 2007; Ipsos MORI Climate Change Survey in 2006; and a Stockholm study “Putting the Environment in Perspective” in 2005, as demonstrating women’s greater concern.

13 Miriam Wyman (ed.), *Sweeping the Earth* (Charlottetown, PEI: Gynergy Books, 1999); Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics*, pp. 17-32.

A modest liberal feminist start—based on getting an equal voice in the public sphere—has been made by women’s groups operating in parallel to UNFCCC meetings. At the Conference of the Parties (COP) held in Milan, 2004, a Gender and Climate Change Network was formed with a view to drawing the UNFCCC and Kyoto Protocol into line with existing international agreements on women’s rights. Women expect politico-legal consistency on the part of governments and UN agencies, but this appears to be a tough call. An analysis of policy adopted at the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) displays a very androcentric arena indeed. Women are under-represented in all climate relevant decision-making bodies—local, national, and international. In fifteen years of climate negotiations, only one UNFCCC resolution has dealt with gender. And this was about committee participation procedure—not the nitty-gritty socio-economics of “agency”—how accepted “masculine and feminine” behaviour trends are differently implicated in global warming.

## Woman, Native, Other

Beyond gender blindness, the androcentric orientation of UNFCCC decision making is compounded by eurocentrism. This means that women in the global South face a double marginalisation. And just as industrial civilisations of the North have been built on the labour and resources of colonised peoples at the periphery of its vision, now the North uses these same regions to mop up its own excessive waste emissions. Since by the Kyoto Protocol, ecosystems are accorded economic value for their photosynthetic capacity to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> and convert it back to life giving O<sub>2</sub> again, a Third World nation can be readily induced to resolve foreign debt by trading on the ecological cleansing service of its forests.

The case of Costa Rica is telling—and should ring an alarm bell for climate change and global justice activists alike. With encouragement from a solid masculine partnership of Canadian government agencies, international environmental NGOs, mining and logging industries, the Costa Rica Ministry of Environment and Energy has enclosed 25 per cent of the nation’s territory as “conservation zones.” This land includes national parks, wetlands, biological reserves, and wildlife refuges. But in the process, hundreds of Indigenous and peasant families have been evicted from forested areas, losing their livelihood. Peruvian ecofeminist researcher Ana Isla has followed these “displaced communities” as they migrate to San Jose tourist areas in hope of surviving by the cash economy. Isla finds that the bodies of women

and girls are the sole remaining “asset” of these resource stripped peoples, and it is they who have no choice now but to become family breadwinners by prostitution.<sup>14</sup> Offering up conservation areas as CO2 sinks results in debt cancellation and can be a national boon for foreign exchange through ecotourism. But ecotourism slides into sex tourism and sex tourism means that Costa Rica has now become a thriving destination for paedophiles from the North. The Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is simply another typically masculinist “solution by deferral” on to the lives of others. And ultimately, what is expendable along the line of trade-offs is the material bodies of women. Out of sight, out of mind.

Will the new round of European Environmental Protection Agreements (EPAs) be a party to such thoughtless neocolonialism in African states? What is likely to happen to grassroots communities as a result of the Australian Government’s climate change diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region?<sup>15</sup> The Clean Energy Investment Framework, a World Bank and Global Environment Facility (GEF) response to the 2005 G-8 Summit at Gleneagles, is pushing nuclear energy generation, coal-fired power, and large dam projects. This approach to “mitigation and adaptation” merely substitutes one kind of corporate driven ecosystem degradation for another—and communities displaced by such mega-projects are likely to become environmental refugees. The wind power farm constructed on land of the Wayuu people in Colombia is another case in point. There was no prior informed consent from the community for this “partnership.” It trampled over sacred territory. Conflicts over the project resulted in many Indigenous deaths. And finally, this “renewables project” was introduced to power Cerrajon, the world’s biggest open coal mine.<sup>16</sup>

As Ahmad Maryudi wrote in a recent issue of the *Jakarta Post*, the affluent consumer world’s offshore carbon “trade and hedge” proposals make little scientific sense, since “most GHG emissions come from the use of fossil fuels in transportation, industry, domestic and commercial applications.”<sup>17</sup> In cultural, political, and ecological terms, market commodification of air and forests through schemes like Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) contradict both the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

---

14 Ana Isla, “Who Pays for Kyoto Protocol?” in Ariel Salleh (ed.), *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice*. London and New York: Pluto Press, 2009.

15 The World Bank anticipates Kyoto mark II and Australia’s forges a new Forest Carbon Partnership with Indonesia by investing \$30 million in the logged swamps of Central Kalimantan. Belinda Lopez, “When Rudd Sticks,” *New Matilda*, 17 June 2008: <[www.newmatilda.com](http://www.newmatilda.com)> (accessed 18 June 2008).

16 Qollasuyo Declaration, La Paz, March 2008. Thanks to Ian Angus for copy and commentary: <[www.climateandcapitalism.com](http://www.climateandcapitalism.com)> (accessed 30 March 2008).

17 Ahmad Maryudi, “Your Climate Change, Not Ours,” *Jakarta Post*, 3 June 2008.

and the CBD. An Indigenous petition to the UNPFII points out that too many so called mitigation schemes prevent access and threaten indigenous agriculture practices; destroy biodiversity, cultural diversity, traditional livelihoods and knowledge systems; and cause social conflicts. Under REDD, States and carbon traders will take more control over our forests.<sup>18</sup>

In March 2008, in the Qollasuyo district of La Paz, peoples of the Americas discussed deforestation, protection of bio-cultural diversity, and climate change. The Qollasuyo Declaration states clearly that the current ecological crisis is a result of the Western capitalist model of development and that solutions based on more of the same productivist reasoning will not succeed. From the Indigenous point of view -

chaotic climatic problems including prolonged rainfall, flooding and droughts, deglaciation, rising sea levels, the expansion of endemic diseases, fires in the tropical rain forest, changes in the growing season ... are breaking the chain of life, threatening the survival of our peoples, and inducing high rates of extreme poverty. Indigenous women are particularly affected.<sup>19</sup>

The Bolivian statement addresses the impacts of neocolonial resource extraction on Indigenous habitats and livelihood; the political marginalisation of Indigenous voices by governments, multilateral agencies, corporate interests, NGOs; and now World Bank sponsored mitigation and adaptation solutions “outrageously assault our way of life.”

## Getting From Here to There

It is not hard to see why Indigenous peoples reject the World Bank’s notion of “good partnership.”<sup>20</sup> At the UNFCCC COP 13 negotiations in Bali, January 2008, Indigenous speakers were barred. At meetings of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in February 2008, they were told they could only remain present if backed by another (that is,

---

18 Petition to the 7th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, April 2008: <[www.risingtidenorthamerica.org](http://www.risingtidenorthamerica.org)> (accessed 15 June 2008).

19 Qollasuyo: <[www.climateandcapitalism.com](http://www.climateandcapitalism.com)> (accessed 30 March 2008).

20 Indigenous Environmental Network, “Indigenous People’s Protest Carbon Trading at UN,” 3 May 2008 <[www.risingtidenorthamerica.org](http://www.risingtidenorthamerica.org)> (accessed 15 June 2008). Also Victoria Tauli-Corpus, *Impact of Climate Change Mitigation Measures on Indigenous Peoples and on their Territories and Lands* (New York: UNFPII, E/C.19/2008/10).



non-indigenous) party.<sup>21</sup> Again, Florina Lopez of the Indigenous Women’s Biodiversity Network of Abya Yala reports that the UNPFII in April 2008 ignored grassroots objections to false climate change solutions like carbon trading, which operate in the service of business-as-usual but do nothing for peoples and environments. If women North and South are “othered” in the deeply masculinist culture of international relations and now fight for a voice at climate change negotiations, so too, Indigenous communities have no platform within the UNFCCC for making their views known. Victoria Tauli-Corpus, chair of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) confirms that the UNFCCC has not yet invited them to participate in its deliberations. However, Indigenous peoples worldwide are mobilising to oppose the gross excess of the neoliberal footprint and its self-serving political responses to global warming.

The Qollasuyo Declaration points to the traditional economic knowledge base achieved by Indigenous peoples by means of sound local environmental management. Again, in common with the labour of domestic care givers in the global North, this “other footprint” rests on the internalisation of responsibility. Peoples with finely attuned ecological skills object to being treated as if they are “in transition” to an urban industrial economy; that is, as if their own tried and tested self-sufficient provisioning systems have no validity. In the culturally genocidal context of World Bank and UNFCCC policy, the rhetoric of “indigenous stewardship” is invoked—and at the same time, emptied of all material meaning. It is imperative for collective struggles to turn the industrial juggernaut around, that Indigenous peoples should have full participation rights in the UNFCCC; consultation and informed consent; an expert committee drawn from Indigenous ranks; and financing of projects that are culturally appropriate.

The discussion of alternatives would ground—and bring consistency to the incoherent pragmatism of agencies like the CBD, UNESCO, FAO, UNICEF, GEF, and UNDP. And instruments do exist, which should legitimate the presence of the “other footprint” in the international climate change dialogue. These are the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 169. A meeting in Jakarta, June 2008, has now called on the UN establish a new convention covering Peasant Rights.<sup>22</sup> In parallel vein, women workers and householders demand a fresh reading of the historic Declaration of the UN Fourth World

21 Report from Bali by the UK-Indonesia NGO, *Down to Earth*, No. 76-77, May 2008: <[www.dte.gn.apc.org/76bcl.htm](http://www.dte.gn.apc.org/76bcl.htm)>; the CBD fiasco is described in the blog: <[www.intercontinentalcry.org/indigenous](http://www.intercontinentalcry.org/indigenous)> (both accessed 18 June 2008).

22 Final declaration of International Conference on Peasants’ Rights, posting by Via Info En <[via-info-en@googlegroups.com](mailto:via-info-en@googlegroups.com)> 25 June 2008.

Conference on Women held in Beijing. As early as 1995, this Platform of Action invited governments and multilateral agencies to get their heads around the many structural links between sex-gender and environments; to analyse programs for gender content and include women in decision-making.<sup>23</sup> But to facilitate this “coming out,” women in Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, will need funds to document gendered energy usage patterns, and funds to travel, lobby, and negotiate as “partners.”<sup>24</sup>

In his famous address to the UN General Assembly in September 2007, Bolivian President Evo Morales said: “the Indigenous peoples of Latin America and the world have been called upon by history to convert ourselves into the vanguard of the struggle to defend nature and life.”<sup>25</sup> Morales is close to the mark, but his angle of vision needs a small adjustment. At least half of all Indigenous communities (like half of all non-Indigenous worker, carer, and peasant communities) are women, materially skilled in eco-sufficient regenerative labours—biological, ecological, economic, and cultural—and morally committed to the maintenance of living processes. This means that as alter-globalisation activists plan for social transformation, the revolutionary potential of women must be recognised as cutting across worker, peasant, Indigenous, and domestic fractions of the movement. Socially, women are a majority, penetrating every strand of the political spectrum. Ecologically, women’s internalising labour on a global scale is what bridges the very metabolism of humanity and nature.

To assimilate the political relevance of these intercultural and sex/gendered rationalities, is to take a first step towards the commons—a global future based on decentralisation, autonomy, and cultural diversity. And in getting “from here to there”, demanding sociological coherence and justice in the UNFCCC process, is time well spent in raising consciousness. towards that historical move. It is critical that neoliberal governments everywhere dis-aggregate and discuss consumption statistics by gender and by culture. Unlike the class-based ecological footprint contained and constrained by capitalist patriarchal priorities, the “woman, native, other footprint” already models a just and sustainable alternative. But will the globalising monoculture be deconstructed in time to save life on earth? The

---

23 UN, *The Official Report of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing Declaration and Platform, 1995: <[www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html)> (accessed 10 May 2008).

24 For an update on women’s UNFCCC representation, see Minu Hemmati, “Gender Perspectives on Climate Change,” Emerging Issues Panel, United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, 52nd Session, March 2008. Gendercc—Women for Climate Justice: <[www.gendercc.net](http://www.gendercc.net)> (accessed 10 May 2008).

25 Indigenous Environmental Network: <[www.risingtidenorthamerica.org](http://www.risingtidenorthamerica.org)> (accessed 15 June 2008).

absence of “gender literacy” and “inter-cultural literacy” among many policy analysts, academic researchers, and even activists, indicates that urgent “capacity building” is wanted, North and South. Without a grasp of basic structural notions like “difference” in relation to resource use, and without an understanding of the socio-political mechanisms of “othering,” it will be impossible to carry through any solutions to global warming, let alone clear a pathway to lasting change.