
INTERVIEW

“We in the North are the Biggest Problem for the South”

A Conversation with Hilikka Pietila

Economist Hilikka Pietila is one of the fore-mothers of ecofeminism. Her work in her native Finland and internationally stands at the intersection of local and global politics. She has been active for decades on behalf of women through the United Nations system and fought against her country joining the European Union. She and Australian-based CNS editor Ariel Salleh have maintained a correspondence for many years. This interview was completed by email in late 2005.

Ariel: Professor Joan Martínez-Alier, editor of *Ecologia Politica* and Chair of the International Society for Ecological Economics claims that your three-tiered model of the economy deeply influenced his thinking. Can you tell us about this analysis?

Hilikka: My critique of economics started with non-counted unpaid work and production in households. Laura Harmaja had opened up this topic in 1929 in the economic journal *Kansantaloudellinen Aikakauskirja* with an article entitled “Is Household Production ‘A Triviality?’”¹ Then the first assessment of the time use and value of household work was made in Finland in 1982.² My insight was that if one looks at the whole economy from a household point of view, it will appear very different to how it is assumed to be in mainstream economics.

Reshaping Ecological Economics

In those days, there was a lot of discussion going on about limits to economic growth in rich countries, and my friend, Kyösti Pulliainen, had recently published the first textbook in Finnish on environmental economics. So he and I put our heads together

¹Laura Harmaja, “Onko kotitaloustuotanto “vähäpätöisyys?” [Is Household Production “A Triviality?”],” *Kansantaloudellinen Aikakauskirja* [Finnish Economic Journal], Vol. 25, 1929, pp. 417–429. See also Kirsti Niskanen, “Hushället och nationalekonomin—Laura Harmajas vetenskapliga utmaning [Household in the National Economy—the Scientific Challenge Faced by Saima Harmaja],” *Naistutkimus* [Finnish Women’s Studies Journal], No. 3, 2002, pp. 32–41.

²Riitta Sääntti et al., *Unpaid Housework: Time Use and Value* (Helsinki: Official Statistics of Finland, 1982).

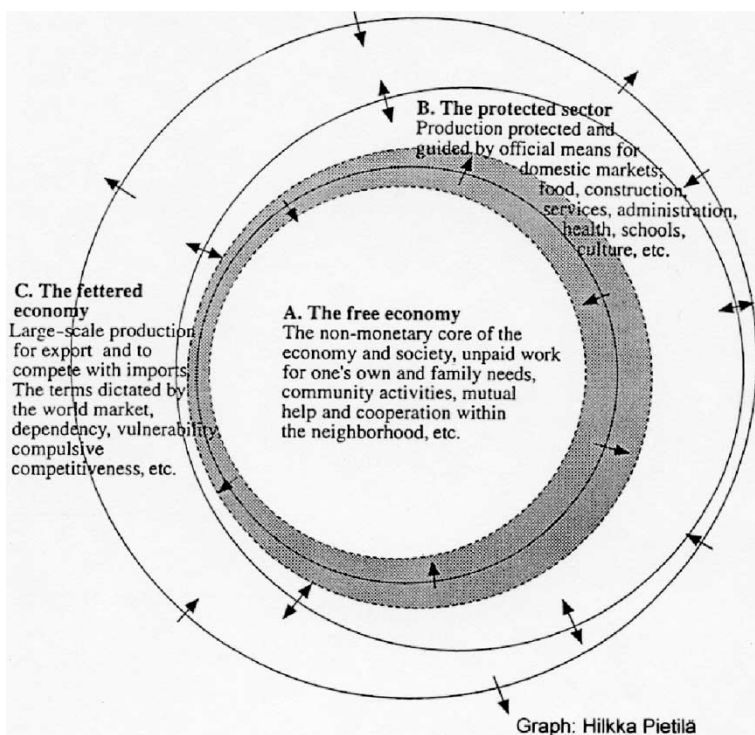


Figure 1. The Three-Tiered Economy.

and started to develop a theory combining the three levels of a modern industrial economy—international markets, nationally provided services, and production within households. We suggested, that economic growth would become unnecessary in a well-off country like Finland if we revived the basic human economy—that is, households—and became less dependent on money and consumption. With this transformation, we thought the daily well-being of people should also increase.

In our figure illustrating this theory, the household stood in the center as the basic unit of the human economy. We identified the three economic components as (1) the “free” economy of non-monetary, voluntary work in households; (2) the nationally “protected” economy of public goods, and (3) the “fettered” economy dependent on export and import in an international market. Our three-tiered approach turned economics right-side up. It was a model where economics was supposed to serve people instead of using people as labor and consumers. The model was first published in the prominent weekly *Suomen Kuvalehti* in 1981 and came out in English two years later.³

³Hilikka Pietilä and Kyösti Pulliainen, *Revival of Non-monetary Economy Makes Economic Growth Unnecessary*, IFDA Dossier, No. 35, 1983.

Ariel: How was your alternative received at the time? Was the model taken up anywhere?

Hilkka: It was taken up in English by the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA), their Dossier being an important forum for critical discussion of development ideas. One of the key people in international debates in those days was the Austrian-French ecosocialist philosopher André Gorz. He read our article in the IFDA Dossier and referred to us enthusiastically in an interview with Finnish professor Jeja-Pekka Roos. But I was not able to follow up on this to see whether he took up our ideas in his work.⁴

Ariel: My hunch is that he converted your idea of household provisioning in the free sector into autonomous labor and depoliticized it by removing the gender aspect! I wonder if Ivan Illich read the same article? A nice research question for someone maybe. . .

Hilkka: Funny, you mention Illich. I was always very encouraged by his writings, and even met him once at a 1982 conference in Baltimore. He listened to my talk saying something like “If women have such excellent ideas, there’s still hope!” He had already written a paper on “Vernacular Gender” by then and later posted it to me. But I have to say, I’ve always found his particular way of writing very difficult to use.

Ariel: Hilkka, what is your appraisal of environmental economics today?

Hilkka: What most environmental economists mean is an adjustment of mainstream economics to ecosystem protection by counting the economic value of environmental damage and the decline of natural resources. But outside of the International Society for Ecological Economics (ISEE), there is hardly any effort to establish “another economics”—one that would take the terms of living nature properly into consideration. This would be a discipline totally at odds with prevailing industrial monetary economics.

The imposition of monetary values, technical efficiency, and economic profitability on agriculture does not work. As the prevailing economy is unable to count basic inputs in agriculture like sunshine and rain, it simply ignores them! You can try to improve the competitiveness and profitability of a farm as a production unit by increasing its size, focusing on cattle instead of integrated farming, using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, obtaining more machinery. This may make the farm as a unit temporarily more productive and profitable, but you only introduce new problems like soil erosion, water pollution, and reduced nutritional quality of food. You also promote unnecessary transport, so inducing climate change, and damage the social structure of rural communities.

⁴Jeja-Pekka Roos, Keskustelu André Gorzin kanssa [Talks with André Gorz], *Tiede ja Edistys* [*Science & Progress*], No. 4, 1983, pp.19-29.

The other peculiarity of mainstream economics, and even of the far more radical ecological economics, is that neither counts the value and importance of unpaid labor in households and communities. Yet this “free” labor—of women mainly—is an indispensable contribution, both to the capitalist economy, as well as to the basic needs and well-being of people. I used to go through the books of Mark Lutz, Herman Daly and others to see if they counted households, caring, or domestic activities as part of the human economy, but they rarely acknowledge it, not to mention assess its value.⁵

Household economists and feminist economists do speak about unpaid labor and production, but then they rarely take ecology into consideration. As I said earlier, household economics has existed since the 1920s. People have been developing environmental economics from the 1960s, and various kinds of alternative economics from the 1970s. Feminist economists got organized in the mid-1990s. But although all these groupings have published widely, mainstream economists have neither listened to, nor read them. They live in an ivory tower. It’s not surprising that we now see a new challenge emerging out there called “post-autistic economics!”⁶

Nature’s Reproductive Cycles

Ariel: Perhaps we should backtrack a little to your beginnings and the experiences that shaped your understanding of the “free economy.”

Hilkka: Well, I was born on a small farm in the Finnish countryside in the 1930s, when we were primarily an agrarian country. The farms used traditional cultivation methods based on three types of production—grain, cattle, forestry—three reproductive cycles mutually enhancing each other. Over the centuries very special cattle and grains had been bred by Finns, and methods were devised to enable farms to provide livelihood for families even in the harsh Northern climate, where the land is covered by snow and ice for two-thirds of the year.

I have felt all my life that these surroundings were wonderful for a child to grow up in, because I observed all the natural life cycles of animals, plants, soil, and seasons. As a child, I automatically learned the purpose of work for livelihood—not for money—and I learned to respect the terms of living nature. In my lifetime, I have seen my country transformed from a fairly self-sufficient agrarian society to a wealthy industrial country. But sadly, Finland is now totally dependent on the international economy.

⁵Mark Lutz and Kenneth Lux, *Humanistic Economics: The New Challenge* (New York: Bootstrap Press, 1988); Herman Daly and John Cobb, *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

⁶See post-autistic economics, online at: www.paecon.net.

In 1950 I enrolled in the Faculty of Agriculture and Forestry at Helsinki University, although the focus of my studies was nutrition, microbiology, and household economics, leading to a degree in household sciences. The training allowed me to combine scientific knowledge with earlier skills and knowledge gained in the farm household—and this holistic approach has remained essential to my life’s work.

Ariel: I guess the most recent expression of your position is “Cultivation and Households: the Basics for Nurturing Human Life” in the *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems*?⁷

Hilkka: Yes, it is the most recent and maybe the most thorough one. I still emphasize the household as the site of “a multitude of production and consumption”—material, social, mental, and emotional—and as the “basic unit of the human economy.” However, my focus has broadened over time. Today I would say that production for basic human needs by means of a sustainable cultivation economy has become paramount.

Ariel: There is a strong resonance here with Vandana Shiva’s work on Indian peasant women’s sustainable economies; Mariarosa Dalla Costa’s work in the Italian movement towards “Another Agriculture”; and Maria Mies’ and Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen’s subsistence perspective, as developed in Germany. This is fascinating to me, because you each arrived at your ecofeminist analyses before knowing of each other’s work. From a sociology of knowledge angle, I think this convergence of understandings from disparate quarters of the globe gives empirical validity to your insights.⁸

Hilkka: It is a great pity that we’ve not met each other more often and been able to work together and develop “a school of thought.” If only we could have shared strategies to lobby for this gendered economic thinking and get our voices heard more widely. I joined the International Association for Feminist Economics (IAFFE) for just this reason, hoping to find others at work on these ideas, but even there, I have only a few colleagues. Getting to know Ellie Perkins from Canada and Mary Mellor from Britain through IAFFE has been very encouraging and important for me. I know Vandana Shiva well, too; we’ve met many times, refer to each other’s writing, and she invited me to be a member of Diverse Women for Diversity. But I have met Maria Mies only once, and this was through DWD.⁹

⁷Hilkka Pietila, “Cultivation and Households: the Basics for Nurturing Human Life,” *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems* (Oxford: UNESCO, 2002).

⁸Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books, 1989); Mary Mellor, *Breaking the Boundaries* (London: Women’s Press, 1992); Mariarosa Dalla Costa, “Towards Another Agriculture,” *The Commoner*, No. 10, 2005, online at: www.thecommoner.org; Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies, *The Subsistence Perspective* (London: Zed Books, 1999).

⁹Diverse Women for Diversity is an international ecofeminist group that emerged in the 1990s at Shiva’s initiative. As a cross-cultural network, it has worked tirelessly for protection of biodiversity, water, women’s and indigenous resource rights.

To elaborate further on the central position of households in economics: the whole economy should be seen from a human point of view or “a subsistence perspective” as Maria Mies would put it. Production, industry, trade, and transportation should operate with a view to serving human needs and preserving the sustainability of natural resources. On the other hand, the prevailing capitalist economy treats people only as means of production and consumption, not as dignified human beings. Neoliberal economics and its growth fetish turn people into pawns of the market.

Now I see the distinction between the “cultivation economy” and the “industrial extraction economy” as critical. The cultivation economy with its interaction of human culture and living nature is essential for all human life. The prerequisites for survival of humanity are a healthy living nature to produce food, raw materials, and energy for human needs and households to procreate and nurture human life. Moreover, it is this material base that makes the monetized, industrial economy possible. To illustrate the profound differences between the cultivation economy and the industrial economy, I use two simple drawings (see Figure 2).

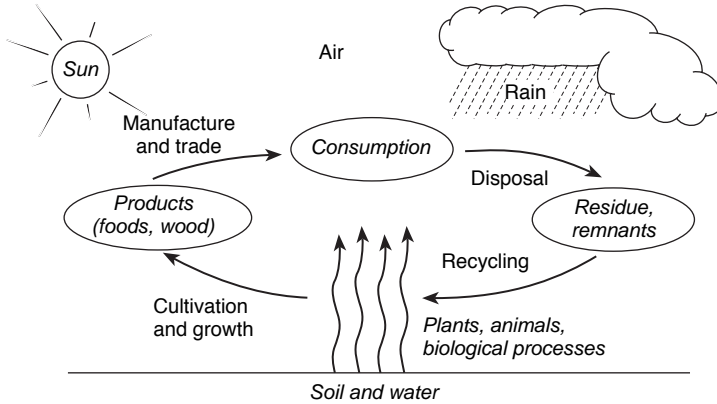
Cultivation Economy and Extraction Economy

The two production systems function on completely different terms. The first, “cultivation,” is dictated by nature according to global climatic zones. The “extraction” or industrial economy is man-made and therefore, its terms can be adapted. The only “absolute term” for the industrial economy is that non-renewable resources and raw materials will finish one day. The real “bottom line” is that living nature is the absolute condition for human life. Human life is totally dependent on other life forms, but not the contrary. To paraphrase U.S. ecofeminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether: the plant can happily carry out its processes of photosynthesis without human beings, but we cannot exist without the photosynthesis of plants.¹⁰ Under the neoliberal drive for infinite “economic growth,” this is forgotten—or deliberately ignored.

Ariel: And socialism? Or ecosocialism? Do you think these approaches to economics get closer to grasping the point? Modern Finnish history had a unique relation to the Soviet system. Has this shaped ecosocialist thought in your country?

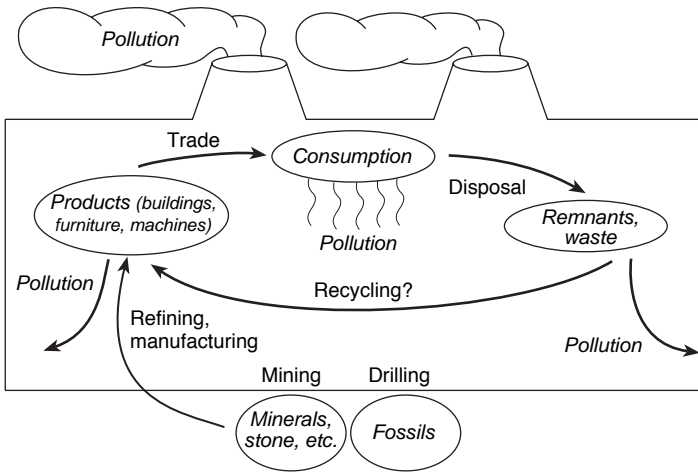
Hilkka: There has been very little ecosocialist writing in Finland, so I can't comment on that. But I do know that the “socialist” Soviet Union was almost the worst country in Europe for polluting its environment and wasting natural resources. Russia today is only slightly better. There are enormous areas of damage—one of them very close to us, is the Kola Peninsula. The Aral Lake is practically dry, and the famous sturgeon of the Caspian Sea is seriously threatened. The Soviet attitude was

¹⁰Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983).



Cultivation Economy
(A Living Economy)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Totally dependent on regional climatic conditions | 6. Life and Nature gives the rhythm |
| 2. Renewable | 7. Mechanization limited |
| 3. Sustainable, if well handled | 8. Longevity good |
| 4. Limited control, unpredictable | 9. Competitiveness poor |
| 5. Only partially monetized: free inputs: sun, air, water, etc. | 10. Limited increase of efficiency and productivity |



Extraction Economy
(Dead or Money Economy)

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Not dependent on the climate | 6. Rhythm of the machines |
| 2. Non-renewable | 7. Fully mechanized |
| 3. No long-range sustainability | 8. Longevity poor |
| 4. Controllable and predictable | 9. Competitiveness good |
| 5. Fully monetized | 10. Constant increase of efficiency and productivity |

Figure 2. Illustration and Comparison of Cultivation Economy and Extraction Economy.

that ecological problems do not exist in the planned economy. Today, Finland is helping Russia to improve sewage handling in the city of St. Petersburg, which has as many people as the whole of Finland does and at least as much sewage! This is a matter of self-interest for us, as the most effective way of decreasing pollution in the Finnish Gulf. Then there is the old nuclear power plant across the Gulf, and if this melted down as Chernobyl did, it would be catastrophic for Finland.

Ecophilosophy and Ecofeminist Materialism

Ariel: When did you become a feminist, Hilkka?

Hilkka: In my view, becoming feminist is a process in life and every one of us is at a different stage—for many women the process has not even started! For me feminism is ecology, pacifism, and humanism seen through women’s eyes and adapted according to women’s experience. I certainly wouldn’t want to see feminism harden into ideology as some kinds of Marxism did. In the late 1990s, Ellie Perkins wrote several papers defining “feminist-ecological-economics.”¹¹ The label signifies how our particular approach is different from ecological economics, and different also from most branches of feminist economics. In fact, Ellie Perkins, Mary Mellor, and myself have been working inside IAFFE to introduce a more ecofeminist consciousness.

I gave my first lecture using ecofeminism at Helsinki University in 1986 with the title “Daughters of Mother Earth.”¹² Here I suggested that by integrating ecophilosophy with feminism we get a recipe for sustainable development. I had read your article “Deeper than Deep Ecology” in *Environmental Ethics* and agreed very much with your thoughts and criticism of Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess.¹³ To call it “deep ecology,” as he did, without recognizing women’s labor, culture, activism or thought was sheer arrogance! I had read ecophilosophers like Sigmund Kvaloy, also from Norway—whom I found better than Naess. And I was familiar with the environmental ethics of Henryk Skolimowski, Rosemary Ruether, and Carolyn Merchant.¹⁴ I found ecophilosophy and ecofeminism often taking up the same points; they were in a way walking towards same goals, but they did not

¹¹Ellie Perkins, “Feminist Ecological Economics and the Growth of Local Economies,” presented at the IAFFE Conference, Washington DC, 1996a; “Feminist Ecological Economics in a Nutshell,” presented as part of the Dean’s Lecture Series, York University, Toronto, 1996b; “Policy Applications of Feminist Ecological Economics,” presented at the IAFFE Conference, Mexico City and Taxco, 1997.

¹²Later published as Hilkka Pietila, “Daughters of Mother Earth” in R. & J. Engel (eds.), *Ethics of Environment and Development* (London: Earthscan, 1990).

¹³Ariel Salleh, “Deeper than Deep Ecology: the Ecofeminist Connection,” *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 6, 1984, pp. 339–345.

¹⁴Sigmund Kvaloy, Mimeograph, 1983; Arne Naess, “A Defence of the Deep Ecology Movement,” *Environmental Ethics*, 1984, Vol. 6, pp. 265-270; Henryk Skolimowski, *Ecophilosophy* (London: Boyars, 1981); Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Harper, 1981).

meet each other. It appeared to me that plaiting them together would be a good recipe for sustainable development.

Ariel: You first presented your “Tomorrow Begins Today” thesis at the NGO Forum of the UN World Conference on the International Decade for Women held in Nairobi in 1985. Getting hold of this in Australia, I have to say how excited I was to discover a woman on the other side of the world affirming the ecofeminist claim that the global majority of “women already model the living alternative.” I’m not sure if you would approve, but today in the context of globalization, I broaden this notion into “meta-industrial” labor. This political economy of reproductive labor houses a straightforward remedy for both the universal devaluation of women and our global ecological crisis. Why do you think it’s so hard for people to accept?¹⁵

Hilkka: If women could only realize that in their everyday life there are so many sane principles and practices for sustainable living. Yet I have felt for quite some time that in affluent European societies so many women have given up the practical house-holding habits so crucial for a self-reliant and healthy life. Industrialization has cut the thread of these skills, once passed on from mother to daughter through the generations. In Finland, women no longer have the culture you and I spoke about twenty years ago—a far better alternative to the conspicuous consumption and competition culture of today. Historically, we in Finland had a much more sustainable life and agriculture before the Second World War. I have only happy memories as a child of that time, although it implied much hard work by men and women in farming and forestry. There were no tractors or even cars; our main driving force was “oat engines,” or horses!

My recent essay “Households as the Counterforce to Globalization: A Dream of Opting out of the Drudgery and Slavery of the Market” suggests adapting practices from these times to defend ourselves from the market.¹⁶ The paper was taken up by the household teachers’ magazine in Finland, because it validates household skills. But at the same time, the International Federation for Home Economics is very careful not to be labelled feminist! Meanwhile, mainstream feminists have been reluctant to study the household and its functions in society! They see it as a site of women’s segregation and subordination. American feminist economists in IAFFE, rarely use the term “household.” Instead, they speak about the “caring economy.” But this notion is far too narrow to cover the variety of functions that go on in households. And if we include all the uncounted work carried out in

¹⁵Hilkka Pietila, “Tomorrow Begins Today,” presented at the NGO Forum, UN World Conference on the International Decade for Women, Nairobi, 1985, published as “Tulevaisuuden vaihtoehto tässä ja nyt,” *Vallan vaihto [Shift of Power]* (Helsinki: WSOY/Perusta, 1988); cf Ariel Salleh, “Global Alternatives and the Meta-Industrial Class” in R. Albritton, et al. (eds.), *New Socialisms: Futures Beyond Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁶Hilkka Pietila, “Households as the Counterforce to Globalization: A Dream of Opting Out of the Drudgery and Slavery of the Market,” unpublished manuscript, 2005.

communities and neighborhoods, the label “caring economy” becomes more problematic still.

Ariel: Further to the genealogy of uncounted work, did the “Wages for Housework” movement of Selma James and other socialist feminists have any impact in Finland during the 1970s? Where does your thinking stand in relation to that position?¹⁷

Hilkka: I first learned about the Wages for Housework movement at NGO activities during UN meetings in the 1980s. When I finally got to meet Selma James at the Beijing Conference in 1995, I explained that I thought their goal was unrealistic, because the universal value of unpaid housework is so high that nowhere is there money enough to pay for it. She and co-workers were not all that interested to hear about our assessments of the value of housework in Finland. In Beijing the Wages for Housework group was pushing for satellite accounts on unpaid work to stand in parallel to national GDP statistics. The idea was adopted in the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Statistical Office of the European Union (EUROSTAT) soon ordered Finland to draft a system showing how these satellite accounts might be made comparable across E.U. countries. This work is ongoing with EUROSTAT.

Ariel: Again delving back into the history of these ideas, when did Hazel Henderson’s main work appear? Did you two exchange notes at some point? Then of course, there’s the late-1980s contribution of New Zealander Marilyn Waring, who used your model in her own ecofeminist exposé of capitalist patriarchal economics as formulated in the UN System of National Accounts.

Hilkka: I was profoundly impressed by Hazel Henderson in the early 1980s. Her book *Creating Alternative Futures: The End of Economics* was first published in 1978. Her “Layer Cake with Icing” or “Total Productive System of an Industrial Society” was path-breaking. I tried without success to get a grant to work with her and only got to meet her during the UN World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995. Later we each went off in separate directions: she adapted herself increasingly to business economic thinking, while I became increasingly critical of capitalist globalization. As for Marilyn Waring’s penetrating analysis of mainstream economics, we have all benefited from this, and personally, I am grateful to her for making my original model known.¹⁸

Ariel: More recently, some North American feminists have begun talking about women’s reproductive labors as the “gift economy.”

¹⁷Selma James, *The Global Kitchen* (London: Housewives in Dialogue Archive, 1985).

¹⁸Hazel Henderson, *Creating Alternative Futures: The End of Economics* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1996); Marilyn Waring, *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).

Hilkka: I know Genevieve Vaughan, mother of the gift economy approach. She has put a lot of work into her particular feminist analysis of patriarchal profit-making.¹⁹ However, I have difficulty seeing how to apply her model in real life and politics. The household is clearly a gift economy because services and products are “given” to each other within the family. On the other hand, socialist feminists claim that households produce the labor force for the market by bringing up new workers without charging business and industry for it. If businesses had to pay for the acquisition of this resource, it would be an enormous outlay. Instead, families and households subsidize industry and business through valuable “gifts” to the labor market!

Moving Between Local and Global

Ariel: Where do you stand *vis-à-vis* Green Party politics?

Hilkka: I think I was green before the Finnish Green Party came along in 1988. Years before, I participated in public discussions about “alternative development.” Two 1960s books very influential to my thinking were: *People! Challenge to Survival* and *Food for Billions*. Then in the late 1970s, my friends Pertti Seiskari and Kyösti Pulliainen published the first textbooks in Finnish on human ecology and ecological economics, respectively.²⁰ Already, I had been writing about constant growth being an impossible idea, but the Club of Rome’s Limits to Growth Report in 1972 was printed in the millions in 30 languages and received enormous publicity.²¹ Then the Group 77 formed among developing countries, the first oil crises broke out in 1973, and a Special Session of the UN was convened in 1974 agreeing unanimously on the program for the New International Economic Order (NIEO).

At this time, E. F. Schumacher’s book *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* also became a bestseller. In 1974 the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation in Sweden launched its project for Another Development, using radical ideas from Juan Somavia, Inga Thorsson, Julius Nyerere, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, and many others. This broad North-South collaboration went on for twenty years. Again in 1974, some 40 well-known figures came together in Mexico, to draft the Cocoyoc Declaration—a catechism for new development thinking. This was followed in 1976

¹⁹Genevieve Vaughan, *For-Giving: A Feminist Criticism of Exchange* (Austin: Plain View Press, 1997); see gift economy online at: www.compassionate.org.

²⁰William Vogt, *People! Challenge to Survival* (London: Gollancz, 1961); Georg Borgstrom, *Mat för Miljarder* [*Food for Billions*] (Borås: LTs Förlag, 1962); Pertti Seiskari, *Ihmisen Ekologia* [*Human Ecology*] (Helsinki: Weilin and Göös, 1976); Kyösti Pulliainen, *Ympäristötaloustieteen perusteet* [Basics of Ecological Economics] (Kuopio: Kustannuskiila, 1976).

²¹Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jörgen Randers, and William Behrens, *Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome* (London: Earth Island, 1972).

by *Reshaping the International Order*, another report to the Club of Rome from top scientists led by Jan Tinbergen of the Netherlands.²²

I could go on manifesting the progressive ideas of those years. I was privileged to participate in many key events, for example, the UN World Conferences on Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, on Population in Bucharest in 1974, on Industrialization in Lima in 1975, and on Women in Mexico City in 1975. I helped translate both *Limits to Growth* and the *Cocoyoc Declaration*. During the 1970s, in my work for the UN Association of Finland, I vigorously propagated the NIEO as a plan for global regulation of international trade to overcome the huge disparity between North and South. Another important UN initiative was the Basic Needs Strategy (BNS) adopted in 1976. These various involvements resulted in one of my most important papers, “Basic Elements in Contemporary Development Thinking,” which was distributed in several languages.²³

So I hope this conveys something of the enthusiastic and progressive atmosphere of the 1970s. The thinking of that time preceded Green politics, and the ideas of “alternative development” were broader. In fact, they were paving the way for the current opposition movement to neoliberal globalization. My intense participation in those events led me to believe that the world economy and politics were moving in a sustainable and just direction for all people on earth. So you can see how disheartening it has been these last 15 years, as excellent ideas and policies are trashed by corporate neo-colonialism. I struggle not to give up and sink into depression.

Ariel: You stood as a parliamentary candidate in Helsinki several times—1966, 1970, and 1983. What led to your frustration and then withdrawal from party politics in 1983?

Hilkka: That was all long before the Greens became a party. I was a member of the Center Party, the former farmers’ party in Finland, which is still going strong in the present coalition cabinet. Its founder in the early 20th century was Santeri Alkio, a political philosopher and follower of Lev Tolstoy and the Narodniks in old Russia. He was a vehement anti-capitalist without being socialist. Later, Tanzanian President Nyerere developed a very similar line of thought on African socialism and education. But after the Finnish Parliamentary elections 1983, I decided not to run any more. There was a wide discrepancy between the Center Party and myself over their failure to pursue the original ideals, and I did not believe any more in power from above.

²²E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1976); Jan Tinbergen, et al., *RIO, Reshaping the International Order: A Report to the Club of Rome* (New York: Dutton, 1976).

²³Hilkka Pietila, “Basic Elements in Contemporary Development Thinking,” *UN 40th Anniversary Book* (Helsinki: UNA, 1978); also in N. Graves, et al. (eds.), *Teaching for International Understanding, Peace and Human Rights* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984).

I liberated myself from party politics and thereafter have been political in everything I do!

Ariel: Among other things, you were Secretary General of the Finnish UN Association for about three decades, yes?

Hilkka: I joined the UN Association in 1963 but had been involved since the late 1950s, when I was asked to help in the Secretariat of the Finnish FAO Commission. There I was astonished to find out what the global reality vis-à-vis food really was. At university, I had not learned anything about the millions of people suffering starvation or children getting severe illnesses due to malnutrition. First I became angry at not being taught these things. Then I started to write articles on food and agriculture. About that time students in my faculty established a voluntary research group on Alternative Cultivation to complement their studies, and they asked me to work with them on ecological and international issues.

As it happened, FAO was preparing a global campaign for Freedom From Hunger to be launched in 1961. This got underway in Finland with my big article on worldwide starvation which was published in a weekly magazine. Then in 1963, I found myself Secretary General in the Finnish UN Association, a coalition of NGOs for information and education about the UN and cooperation for international understanding and development. From the beginning I focused on the interdependence of North and South, and soon natural resources and environment came into the picture. My thinking has always been “globalized.” This is why I was so enthusiastic about the NIEO plan to regulate international trade for the benefit of developing countries, the exact opposite of today’s neoliberal free trade policies.

But in the 1980s, NIEO and BNS were thwarted by Northern governments in the UN. The World Bank and IMF imposed structural adjustment policies on developing countries throughout the global South. Northern capitalist financiers were becoming stronger in their hegemonic power over the world economy. Developing countries sank into debt—and have now paid their debts in interest and amortization many times over. UN planners still wrote NIEO and BNS ideas into the 1980s Third Development Decade, but in practice these ideas were ignored. At that time, I formulated my message: “We in the North are the Biggest Problem for the South.”

Since the 1990s, structural adjustment policies have been imposed in the global North as well. Here it implies squeezing public expenditure, lowering taxes, and privatizing production, trade, enterprises, transport, and even schools and hospitals. That is what the economic integration of Europe in its present form implies, and that was one reason, why so many in the Nordic countries voted against membership in the European Union.

Ariel: Your line “We in the North are the Biggest Problem for the South” pretty much sums up the socialist ecofeminist viewpoint. And perhaps this is one of the reasons why it meets hostility from some mainstream and academic feminists, especially in the U.S. I’m not sure that ecosocialists in the North have fully digested this message either, judging from their use of energy-hungry technological solutions for everything! The other key ecofeminist dimension, of course, is respect for the diverse economic practices of indigenous cultures.

Hilkka: Neither Gro Harlem Brundtland’s report *Our Common Future* in 1987, nor the World Women’s Congress for a Healthy Planet in 1991, held in Miami by Bella Abzug’s Women, Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), understood the implication of cultural difference. But indigenous cultures are too big an issue to take up here, and I am not familiar enough with them. The indigenous Sami people live across the northernmost territories of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. They have a very unique culture and skills to survive in the North; their skills would not apply in southern Finland though.

Security of Food, Security of Person

Ariel: A major focus of ecofeminists in the face of neoliberal expansionism is “food security.” Have you worked at all on genetically engineered food and its impacts North and South?

Hilkka: I have been following the problem of feeding the growing numbers of people since the 1950s. The problem of hunger—or “food security” as it is called now—is the issue on which the least progress has been achieved in the past 50 years. In the meantime, science and technology have produced unpredictable achievements like GMOs, an invention which should be banned, as it does not help secure food for people, and its environmental side effects are not knowable. My “Sketch for a New World Food Order: The Future of Agriculture in a Global Perspective” was worked out for the Congress of Nordic Agricultural Scientists meeting in 2003.²⁴ It is my contribution to a debate about getting the “cultivation” economy out of the WTO. We have to find another place for negotiations on agricultural trade. It is necessary and will always be necessary to regulate trade with agricultural products and in particular with food, but it cannot be done on a neoliberal basis.

Ariel: Your recent work argues for social justice through “self sufficiency.”²⁵ Was food security part of your agenda during the 1990s to prevent Finland being “annexed” by the E.U.?

²⁴Hilkka Pietila, “A Sketch for a New World Food Order: The Future of Agriculture in a Global Perspective,” *Nordic Agriculture in Global Perspective: NJF’s 22nd Congress, Proceedings* (Tampere: University Print, 2003).

²⁵Hilkka Pietila, “Eradicating Poverty by Building a Welfare Society: Finland as a Case Study?” *Cooperation South*, No. 2 (New York: UNDP, 2001).

Hilkka: The E.U. has the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which it tries to impose on all member states. But even in a fairly small region like Europe, a common agricultural policy does not work. It is impossible because climatic differences between the Nordic countries and the Mediterranean area are so big. In Southern Europe, farmers are able to have two or three harvests a year, but Nordic countries cannot have more than one. It is easy to see who will lose in that competition!

But this was not the main reason for opposing E.U. membership. The Finns believe in democracy and are used to it working well in our country of 5 million. The opposition movement felt strongly that in a political unit of 370 million people—as the E.U. was then, now it is almost 100 million more—there would be little democracy left. Afterwards, this proved to be true! Our plan was that all five Nordic countries should stay out of the E.U. and create The Other Union, not necessarily dependent on the rest of Europe. We could have our own policies vis-à-vis the world economy and developing countries. But the strongly manipulative publicity for the E.U.'s membership had unlimited resources and we failed; all except Norway, where the resistance movement won.

Ariel: Perhaps your best known book is *Making Women Matter: The Role of the United Nations*. Why did you write this?²⁶

Hilkka: It has a funny history or herstory. I had first written on “Women—A Human Rights Issue or Key to Development?” for the UN’s 40th anniversary book, to be published by the Finnish UN Association in 1984. I felt that there should be at least one article on the UN and women. Thierry Lemaesquier, Director of the UN Non-Governmental Liaison Service in Geneva, immediately proposed it be translated into English. Besides, the Third UN World Conference on Women was coming up in Nairobi in 1985, and there was no informational material on women and the UN. So it was published in spectacular purple covers as a booklet, with an extensive bibliography by Jeanne Vickers.

In Nairobi it went like hot cakes; clearly, something like this was much needed. Then I began a new book with Jeanne Vickers and the UN International Research and Training Institute for Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). Research Director Krishna Patel even gave me a month at INSTRAW in Santo Domingo to finalize the manuscript. *Making Women Matter* has now run to several editions. The 1994 one added a Foreword by Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General for the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in 1995.

²⁶Hilkka Pietila and Jeanne Vickers, *Making Women Matter: The Role of the United Nations* (London: Zed Books, 1990; 3rd edition, 1996).

Ariel: Your 2002 monograph is called *Engendering the Global Agenda: The Story of Women and the United Nations*. What changes have you observed for women as a result of their presence within the UN system?²⁷

Hilkka: 2005 is 30 years on from our first Mexico City Conference in 1975 and ten years on from Beijing. The four UN World Conferences on women during these decades constitute a systematic process, appraised every five years. In *Engendering the Global Agenda*, I take up women's achievements since the League of Nations was established in 1919. It is amazing how much women have influenced the intergovernmental process within the LN and UN organizations in these 85 years. Among the early activists, Australian feminist Jessie Street was instrumental at the foundational UN San Francisco meeting, getting positions open to women within the UN system. Later she became First Vice-Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Women's interventions in shaping the language of the 1945 UN Charter and 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights have had far-reaching consequences. Sexuality and family planning have been brought out of the shadows of secrecy to be recognized as a woman's human right. Violence against women in its many forms is still the worst plague for women globally, but it has at last emerged from silence to be condemned as a crime against humanity. Only by means of a global institution like the UN has it been possible to make such changes all over the world in a few decades. These new rights are not yet a social reality everywhere, but we have the international framework in place to give women a legitimate ground for claiming their rights.

The 1970s was a particularly important decade for women with International Women's Year, the first UN World Conference on Women, adoption of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the UN Decade for Women all getting underway. Then came the grand consolidation of past achievements and future aims in Beijing in 1995. Finally, women's indispensable role in realizing the UN Millennium Development Goals was recognized at the 2005 World Summit in New York, a gathering of 151 heads of state and 191 delegations.

Ariel: Even so, since the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, there's been debate among feminists over the usefulness of this UN process . . .

Hilkka: My response is that those women who question the importance of the UN for women have not yet studied our success story. They have not discovered how much women have gained through the UN and how they have managed to turn this world organization of patriarchal governments into "a girl's best friend." Nowadays most women's criticism is addressed to member states of the UN, and that's appropriate. It's up to governments to see that the Beijing Platform for Action is

²⁷Hilkka Pietila, *Engendering the Global Agenda: The Role of the United Nations* (Geneva: UN/NGLS, 2002).

implemented. Many of us still work for a Fifth UN World Conference on Women to reinvigorate the momentum created by Beijing, but the “the war on terror” has not been favorable for the latter. Many of us even dream of a “Women’s Conference on the State of the World” held outside of the UN and intergovernmental processes, but nobody has found a financier.

Patriarchy as a State of War

Ariel: You are truly a global citizen, and you closely link ecology, peace, international cooperation, and the advancement of women . . . Your work has taken you to Tanzania, India, Peru and Mexico, Norway and Sweden, Hungary, China, USA, Italy, Greece and Cyprus, Spain, Russia, Dominican Republic, Austria, Holland, Turkey, Latvia, Mozambique . . . Tell us about some of the women’s peace groups that you have worked with and what they set out to do.

Hilkka: I’ve often said that Women for Peace was my feminist initiation, as I became aware of the interplay between patriarchy and militarism and their penetration of the whole social matrix. The Women for Peace movement emerged simultaneously in all Nordic countries at the end of 1979 in response to an extremely tense situation between the Big Powers. Half a million women and men signed a protest against this politics going on over our heads in Europe. We brought the protest with signatures to Secretary General Kurt Waldheim in the Second UN World Conference on Women in Copenhagen in 1980, and we sent our protest simultaneously to Presidents Carter and Brezhnev.

In Copenhagen we found out that women in Germany and Switzerland had also collected tens of thousands of names. Later we realized that feminist and ecofeminist peace groups under names like Another Mother for Peace, Women Strike for Peace, Peace Links, Women Against Military Madness, and others had also been born in North America in those years. The Nordic Women for Peace organized big marches in 1981 from Copenhagen to Paris, in 1982 from Stockholm through Helsinki, Leningrad and Moscow to Minsk, and in 1983 from Oslo to Washington. This inspired British women to march in 1981 from Cardiff to Greenham Common. Here they surrounded the huge U.S. military airbase and established the famous Greenham Common Peace Camp, protesting against U.S. cruise missiles to be placed there.

During these years, Greenham women organized many events and drew together women from all over Europe. For years the camp was a generator of fantastic ideas for feminist peace actions, since women lived there full time. They were threatened and harassed daily by troops from the base, but they responded in countless imaginative ways. Eventually, their pressure and a changing political situation resulted in the withdrawal of cruise missiles from the base in 1991. But the Women’s Peace Camp remained as a symbolic protest against nuclear sites and militarism in general until 2000. The Women for Peace movement and other feminist peace

groups invented images of positive values and symbols of peace like children, butterflies, and flowers. This contrasted with the focus on weaponry and the rhetoric of fear and horror in the mainstream approach to peace.

Ariel: Today, it is Women in Black who are leading our global call for peace in defiance of the preoccupation with resource accumulation and self-aggrandizement that characterizes the masculine leadership style. You have written about “Patriarchy as a State of War.”²⁸ How do you see the continuum between global conflicts and intimate violence against women?

Hilkka: The Third UN World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 brought the issue of violence against women into the official arena. The Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women towards 2000 pointed out that

peace . . . cannot be separated from the broader question of relationships between women and men in all spheres of life and family . . . Violence against women . . . is a major obstacle to the achievement of peace and other objectives . . . like equality and development.²⁹

Based on this statement, violence against women has become a priority for the UN Commission on the Status of Women. There were excellent UN reports on the subject in 1988 and 1989, and the issue is now permanently on the UN agenda as a crime against humanity.

Ariel: What is striking about your political trajectory is the fact that you’ve not only been a consistent activist, held numerous public roles at national and international levels, but you have also managed to keep writing! Your books and articles run to hundreds in the Nordic languages and English, as well as translations into ten or so others including Polish, Spanish, Indonesian, and Russian. Is there a website where people can access your publications?

Hilkka: Unfortunately not. I have not found time to consider it, but it could be useful to make these ideas more generally accessible.

Ariel: I hear that your work was recently honored in Finland with an Oulu University Honorary Doctorate and that you have also received an Award from the Association of Non-fiction Writers. Perhaps it’s time we set up an Ecofeminist Right Livelihood Award! Or do you have a Right Livelihood Award already?

Hilkka: No, but I can say that I was heavily involved in the Finnish Village Action Movement which received one in 1992!

²⁸Hilkka Pietila, “Patriarchy as a State of War,” *Anniversary Book for Betty Reardon*, unpublished manuscript, 2003.

²⁹Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women towards 2000 (Geneva: United Nations, 1985), paragraphs 257 & 258.