

Women's Work, Nature and Colonial Exploitation: Feminist Struggle for Alternatives to Corporate Globalization

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ABSTRACT

This article uses Hilikka Pietilä's reconceptualization of the economy as three spheres of production (free, protected and fettered) to illuminate the new ways in which neo-liberal globalization is intensifying exploitative capitalist processes. The study focuses on the particular vulnerabilities of women, the value of their unpaid work, and the transformative significance of their resistance.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article utilise la réconceptualisation de l'économie de Hilikka Pietilä, en trois sphères de production (la sphère libre, la sphère protégée et la sphère entravée) afin de mettre en évidence les nouvelles formes qui renforcent l'exploitation capitaliste de la globalisation néo-libérale. L'étude porte en particulier sur les vulnérabilités des femmes, sur la valeur de leur travail non rémunéré et sur l'effet transformateur de leur résistance.

INTRODUCTION

The corporate globalization facing us today has powerful links with earlier periods of capitalism. However, there are also important differences. Capitalism has always had a global reach, and the growth of capitalist markets has always and everywhere spawned not only a relative or absolute impoverishment of women, colonies, workers, marginal groups and communities, but also a decrease in cultural and biological diversity. In this article, I will draw on Hilikka Pietilä's interesting three-sphere reconceptualization of the economy to examine the new ways neo-liberal globalization is intensifying

these exploitive processes. I will focus special attention on both the particular vulnerabilities of women and the unique importance of women's unpaid work and political resistance in this period.

Early increases in production for capitalist trade and profit came at the expense of production-for-use, because they removed the means of subsistence from individuals and communities (in core and periphery) and because they institutionalized, if not slavery and genocide, men's dependence on wages and women's dependence on men (and now, more than ever, on low wages). From the beginning, a cross-class "male deal" (Turner 1997) mandated higher wages for men, thus ensuring that women's dependence on and service to men persisted as earlier patriarchal patterns crumbled and entirely new modes of production emerged. The brutal processes of environmental and social enclosure, appropriation, disruption and destruction at the heart of market expansion in both "old" and "new" worlds reproduced patriarchal as well as capitalist power.

Dispossessed European populations (like the Scottish crofters forced into starvation when their common lands were enclosed to run sheep for profit in wool) fled or were deported *en masse* to "new worlds" where indigenous populations suffered even more violent processes of enslavement, dispossession, ecological destruction and – ultimately – genocide. Today, these practices continue in both the "developed" and "developing" worlds.

In the economic south, forest dwellers are displaced by cattle ranchers, communities are destroyed by oil and mineral extraction, local populations are excluded from nature reserves for ecotourism and biodiversity prospecting. In the economic north, corporate offshore fishing is wiping out the inshore fishery, and family farms are being taken over by corporate agribusiness.¹ Environmental degradation, much of it fueling and fueled by enclosure, is increasing everywhere. Ozone and soil depletion, water and air pollution, and global warming threaten the whole planet, though the most immediate and devastating consequences are felt by poor and powerless communities where toxic waste is dumped (Sydney, Cape Breton), uranium is mined (Western Shoshone), military overflying is practiced (Innu of Northern

1. The average farm size in the UK today is 6 times that of 1967 (over 1,000 animals compared to an average of 100 in 1967). (Branigan and Brown 2001).

Labrador), and oil (Ogoniland) and chemical (Love Canal) destruction is sanctioned.²

Capitalist markets fuel the concentration of wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands. So, by 1997, 450 billionaires had assets equal to the combined annual income of the poorest 50% of the world's population. In this type of world, human and non-human life become commodities, valuable only when they contribute to profit for these few, expendable when they do not. Whole groups of people and whole communities are abandoned or actively delivered to their fate all over the world. Street children, single mothers, the homeless, the elderly, the disabled and the unemployed are written off. Canadian farming and fishing communities whose viability has been destroyed by corporate agriculture and fishing are declared redundant. Villages in the Upper Nile are razed to make way for oil development (Flint 2001). Indigenous and peasant communities in Canada, India and China, with aggregate populations in the millions are respectively destroyed by the James Bay, Narmada and Three Gorges Dam projects to produce hydro-electric power for "development."

The huge cost of this "development" is masked by national and international accounting and policymaking practices that use the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the only measure of wealth and well-being. The GDP recognizes only market value. The value of non-market factors, such as nature, unpaid work and non-monetary production that are crucial to the real wealth and well-being of individuals and communities and to the survival of the planet is entirely omitted (Douthwaite 1999). Women's unpaid work is concealed. Ecological damage and social destruction or appropriation suffered by the many so that production can increase for the market (that is, a growing GDP) also remain invisible unless the destruction opens the way to profit (Shiva 1989, Waring 1988, Cobb and Halstead 1995).³

For instance, when local farmers who still grow crops mainly for their own use and for local trade are seduced or forced to produce for external markets and when local access to common land necessary for subsistence is lost to

2. A 1990 study of more than 3,000 U.S. cities and counties showed that pollution exposure is both shockingly widespread and shockingly unequal. 57% of whites, 65% of Hispanics, and 80% African Americans were found to live in areas with high air pollution (Laurel Rayburn 2001). Three out of five Black and Hispanic Americans live in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites (World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet 1992, p. 35).

3. Environmental and social destruction appear as pluses/benefits when they offer opportunities for profit; otherwise, they are unrecorded/invisible. So, for instance, a breakdown in community trust and safety will register as increased sales of household locks and alarms. The September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre will have increased the GDP of the USA.

large-scale agricultural, resource, or industrial production for export, families start depending on money from unreliable crop prices or on meager wages to buy goods, whose prices are also unstable. These incomes often purchase less than the families previously produced. Worse, many individuals or families don't even get these inadequate incomes. In the end, though, their purchases and the value of the expanding commercial production still register as increases in wealth, while the displaced or superseded subsistence production and its losses are never counted. Neither is the cost of migration of individual community members or whole families in search of survival, nor the ecological and health damage caused by large-scale chemicalized monocropping, industrial production and resource extraction.

This sleight of hand allows increased profits for a few, even at great social and environmental cost, to be presented as increased wealth for all. It allows economic "development" to be presented as a panacea for the very impoverishment it creates:

Subsistence economies that satisfy basic needs through self-provisioning are not poor in terms of deprivation. Yet, the ideology of development declares them so because they do not participate overwhelmingly in the market economy; that means they do not consume commodities produced for and distributed through the market, even though they might be satisfying those needs through self-provisioning mechanisms...

[S]ubsistence, as culturally perceived poverty, has provided the legitimization for the development process as a poverty removal project. As a culturally biased project it destroys wholesome and sustainable lifestyles and creates real material poverty, or misery, by the denial of survival needs themselves, through the diversion of resources to intensive commodity production. (Shiva 1989, p. 10)

I. PIETILÄ'S RECONCEPTUALIZATION

Using data gathered in a Finnish government study⁴, which "sketched a comprehensive picture of our economy... including the value of unpaid labour and production in the households," Pietilä (n.d., p. 6) has shown that even in advanced industrial nations, much individual and community sustenance and quality of life still depend on the health of the local environment and on *non-market* relations, activities, goods and services. Her important work broadens and redefines the economy to encompass three spheres of production, namely

4. *Housework Study*, Part VIII, Official Statistics of Finland, SVTXXII (1981).

free, protected and fettered. These provide a useful frame for examining the qualitatively new processes of change driving neo-liberal globalization and the central place of both women's work and women's current resistance. She found that in 1980 in Finland:

- *the free sphere*, made up of all non-monetary production for local use including housework and volunteer work, accounted for 54% of the total work time and 35% of the total value of production;
- *the protected sphere*, including all private and public production of goods and services for the home market by individuals, private businesses and public services such as education, transportation and health, accounted for 36% of work time and 46% of the value produced;
- *the fettered sphere*, all production for international exchange, that is all production subject to the demands/fetters of international competition, accounted for 10% of work time and 19% of the value produced.⁵

The neo-liberal agenda we are facing today is essentially a corporate drive aimed at increasing the fettered sphere (and the profits of transnational corporations) at the expense of both free and protected spheres. In all national economies, even the most "advanced," production in the fettered sphere (though greater than in 1980) remains modest compared to market and non-market production for home consumption in the protected and free spheres. Still, national and global economic policies, rules and regulations pander more and more to the needs, desires and interests of transnational corporations. The fettered sphere fills the whole screen of popular and policy discourse. We are told, and most of us have come to believe, that the global market *is* the economy. We peoples of the economic south and north are told not only that our survival depends on private corporations' competitive success in this global market but, paradoxically, that we must be prepared to sacrifice a great deal to ensure successful corporate production for this market. This is very different from earlier periods.

The protected sphere as conceptualized by Pietilä is twofold, consisting of both public/state and private production for domestic consumption. Until fairly recently, this sphere had continually increased, primed initially by the enclosure/appropriation/transfer of labour and resources from the free spheres of both core and periphery. Historically, industrial capitalist growth mainly expanded domestic production and markets (protected sphere) fed by international "trade" (fettered sphere), including trade among industrial

5. Pietilä's research is reported in Waring (1988). See also, Pietilä (1993 and n.d.).

nations and umpteen forms of colonial exploitation, some more obviously violent than others.⁶ Rising market demand in the metropolises came first from an expanding trading class with money and from the independent craftspeople, merchants, farmers and owners of capital who were getting richer serving their needs; the demand also came from the growing numbers of propertyless poor who were losing their subsistence livelihoods to others' search for profit and were being forced to provide for their own needs in the market (if they could). The propertyless' new dependence on money and on the market ensured their availability (originally whole families at desperately low wages) as workers in household service, in capitalist agriculture, in crafts and later, in industrial enterprises. The home consumer market expanded as some of these male workers won wages high enough to support a rising standard of living for family members, including dependent wives and children no longer in the labour force.

Creating and sustaining industrial infrastructure (canals, railways, roads, banking systems, hospitals, water, sewage and power systems) also enlarges the protected sphere. So, too, does providing the public and social services needed for a healthy and skilled (and compliant) work force. Years of women's and workers' struggles in industrializing nations for a share of the growing monetary wealth, and a better and more secure life have won public education, health care, libraries, parks, unemployment insurance, old age pensions, social assistance, safety protection and environmental regulation, all of which enlarge the protected sphere.

The growing (largely low-paid) female labour force that has emerged over many decades in crucial social services has reflected a gradual collective and public sharing of what remain largely women's unpaid responsibilities for individual and community health and for reproduction. Growing private

6. These means include resource theft and extraction; forced labour including slavery; government imposed taxes (used not only to collect revenue but to force fully functional local economies into external trade to earn the required tax money); unequal terms of trade and forced colonial export and import relations.

To give just two among a legion of criminal examples: raw cotton was imported from India and cotton cloth was sold back to the subcontinent by the British who established this "trade" by destroying the thriving indigenous industry. Anyone, caught producing cloth risked losing their thumb. China, which had no need or desire for any European goods available was nevertheless forced to "trade" silks, pottery, spices and other goods demanded in Europe. To stem the unacceptable drain of silver to China that resulted from this lopsided "trade," the British introduced opium grown in India and sent gun boats to defend "free trade" whenever Chinese authorities tried to refuse this "import."

service industries such as fast foods, largely supported as well by women's low wages, also bring women's traditional free sphere responsibilities and work into the protected sphere.⁷

Economic growth has never been cost free, and its costs and benefits have always been savagely unequal. However, in the years between the transitional devastation of early capitalist development and the triumph of neo-liberal agendas in the 1980's, this relative growth of the protected sphere of the economy in the industrial nations has tended to increase collectively and socially managed wealth as well as private wealth. Popular struggles over these decades forged an industrial form of the *civil commons* defined by McMurtry as "any co-operative human construct that enables the access of all members of a community to life goods" (McMurtry 2001, p. 822).

In the decades following World War II, economic growth was pursued in the name of the public good (understood as increasing personal and public wealth). Economic competitiveness and growth were sold by conservative as well as liberal and social democratic parties, not as ends in themselves but as means to enhance personal incomes and improve services and security. Harold MacMillan defeated the postwar Labour government in Britain with promises of higher personal incomes and personal consumption as well as better education, health care and transportation.

Since that time, the neo-liberal ideologues of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Brian Mulroney and their successors in *all* political parties have largely succeeded in reversing popular expectations of a better life through economic growth. People everywhere now expect to serve rather than be served by economic growth, which has moved from a means to an end in public discourse. Neoliberal ideologues no longer claim that economic competitiveness will improve the lives of the general population. Rather, they tell us we must sacrifice our wage levels, our social services and our social security to ensure the international competitiveness required for growth.

The supposedly urgent and unavoidable need to repay public debt and reduce government deficits is being used in both the economic North and South to legitimize and enforce the neo-liberal agendas responsible for this

7. This change does not release women from their unpaid work and responsibility in the free sphere. It rather adds low paid work in the protected sphere to women's continuing unpaid work load. So, it cannot accurately be spoken of as a shift of responsibility from the private to the public sphere. Rather, private, largely female responsibility is shared socially with the development of services that are subsidized by women's low wages and rely on women's extremely demanding double work day (paid and unpaid).

impoverishment. Structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF on indebted countries of the economic South as a condition for continued World Bank loans (desperately needed for debt repayment!) and selective fiscal austerity and downsizing by national governments and capitalist corporations in the economic North reflect these agendas. These also appear in the successive removal of social and political limits on international trade, and investment and on transnational production for profit in all regions through international free-trade agreements (such as NAFTA and FTAA), GATS (General Agreements on Trade in Services) and TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of International Property Rights).

Governments are bound to these agreements once they have signed. Continuous and irreversible “liberalization” is assured by ratchet mechanisms that compel governments to “liberalize” ever more, never less. The provisions of these agreements are interpreted and applied not by national governments, but by supra-national bodies. These bodies have the power to nullify traditional practices and overrule elected governments’ attempts to pursue social, environmental and other ends that might conflict with unbridled trade and profit (Palast 2001, Nader 2001).

In establishing these mechanisms, the G7/G8 nations are actively abetting the transfer of state power from national governments to international bodies. They are implementing a “ruling ideology that centres on the replacement of government and state planning by corporate strategic planning, and the establishment of global corporate rule” (Shiva 1997, p. 22). Alain Touraine calls this the triumph of capitalism defined as “a market economy that refuses to be controlled by external forces and institutions and ties and, on the contrary, uses the rest of society as resources for its rational economic action” (1998, p. 2).⁸

Earlier periods of relatively untrammelled capitalism have preceded this one. And capitalist relations have always been global in reach. Free trade is not a new aspiration or hypocrisy. In the nineteenth century, in the name of free trade, Britain did nothing to check price hikes or the export of grain during devastating famines in India and Ireland, even while brutally prohibiting local production and trade in goods that British manufacturers wished to sell.

8. State power, far from being supplanted by the concentration of power in transnational corporations, is being used to serve that concentration. The dominance of the global market that restricts national options, and is used to justify painful restructuring in the name of competition, is itself the product of policies dictated and implemented by national governments of wealthy nations and the multi-lateral institutions they control, with the collaboration of powerful groups in the economic south.

Likewise today, the world is being opened, not to free trade with a level playing field, but to unfettered trade by transnational corporations. Small producers of “freely” traded goods are extremely vulnerable to falling world prices that leave transnationals untouched. Two years ago, coffee fetched \$2 a kilogram; today it sells for less than \$1 a kilogram and prices are still falling. The livelihoods of 20 million households that depend on coffee are collapsing, with devastating consequences. Meanwhile, the coffee chain Starbucks posted a 40% increase in profits for the first quarter of 2001. Nestlé, the world’s largest coffee roaster, had profits exceeding \$1 billion last year for its beverage operations and is expecting a 20% profit growth this year (Watkins 2001). José Bové, spokesperson for Confédération Paysanne, a French farmers’ union and major figure in the developing international anti-globalization movement has asked:

who would dare to claim that the huge export of coffee, bananas, cocoa and rice to the countries of the North over many decades has improved the living conditions of peasants in the South? Who would ever presume to say a thing like that while looking such peasants straight in the eye, at a time when they face rising poverty? And who would dare tell African farmers who have been ruined by competition from subsidised European meat that the sweeping away of customs barriers has been a good thing for them? (Bové 2001, p. 30)

However, despite the devastation of unequal and misnamed “free trade” shared with earlier periods, the corporate globalization facing us today is not just more of the same. Today, not only goods but also services and capital are traded “freely.” Local services and productive capacity are being sacrificed to transnational profit rather than enhanced by it. Hilikka Pietilä’s conceptualization of three economic spheres highlights the significantly new logic of the neo-liberal agenda more clearly.

II. THE FETTERED SPHERE RAIDS THE FREE AND PROTECTED SPHERES

Unlike earlier periods when the protected sphere was the main engine of economic growth and beneficiary of international “trade,” transnational capital is now, with the support of the national governments of the most powerful capitalist nations and the multi-lateral international agencies they control, brutally raiding the free and protected spheres of the economy to enhance the fettered sphere.

Encroachment and parasitism on the free sphere is intensified and expanded in new levels of exploitation that are colonizing life itself and, ultimately, the

future. Legislated preference or protection for domestic producers is outlawed, and private companies along with public and social services easily become prey to non-productive transnational corporate buy outs (or give aways!). Any elements of the protected sphere that cannot be turned to profit by transnational corporations are being dumped on to the free sphere, where the increasing burdens of want and work, and environmental and social destruction are borne mainly by women. International agreements and domestic policies in almost all countries today routinely subordinate social, environmental and cultural considerations to transnational trade and profit. New levels of broader, more intense appropriation and exploitation countenance *no* limits on economic growth (Barlow 1996).

Under NAFTA, for instance, traditional collective landholding patterns and rights become illegal barriers to private ownership and profit. The Zapatistas in Chiapas are struggling to defend communally based livelihoods, and therefore indigenous and peasant survival, from this NAFTA sanctioned robbery. When the Canadian government banned the use of a gasoline additive hazardous to human health and the environment, its producer, Ethyl Corporation, brought a \$251 million suit under the NAFTA for damages to its reputation and future profits. Canada settled out of court a year later, lifting the ban, apologizing publicly, and paying \$13 million.

Under the GATS and TRIPS, transnational corporations have rights that are actually denied to local companies. They can challenge governments over any of their actions, or the actions of others within their jurisdiction, deemed to have infringed transnational property rights or “unreasonably” limited their opportunities for profit. Cases are heard by unelected judges at the WTO in Geneva, Switzerland, in closed hearings where neither the public nor the media are allowed, no transcripts are available and no appeals are possible.

The WTO recently ruled that European preferential tariffs for bananas from small independent producers in the Caribbean infringe agribusiness rights to profit maximization. It also upheld the import rights of Monsanto and U.S. cattle and dairy associations against the European Union’s attempt, because of the known health hazards, to ban beef with synthetic hormones.

Until the creation of the WTO in 1995, few countries in the economic South had intellectual property laws. Now, however, all 140 WTO members must conform to U.S. intellectual property rights legislation, which extends patent rights for 20 years. Thus, protection for monopoly production by transnational corporations sweeps around the world. When the South African government passed a law allowing cheaper generic drugs to be produced and sold, 39 pharmaceutical giants used international trade agreements in the

courts to protect their 20-year patents and astronomical profits, despite the desperation of people and countries doomed to do without life-saving drugs at these high prices. World outrage at the drug companies' actions in this case have resulted in some face-saving moves on their part to make the drugs they produce available more cheaply in the poorer countries. But the patents, providing vast profits from 20-year monopolies, remain.

The G7/G8 governments are imposing neoliberal agendas favouring the fettered sphere domestically as well as internationally. Through the World Bank and the IMF they have been forcing brutal "structural adjustments" on poorer nations for decades, insisting that these nations maximize foreign-currency earnings (that is, earnings from transnational trade) above all other production needs or policy goals in order to repay their foreign debt.⁹ Each indebted nation of the South must accept a tailor made Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) proposed by the IMF to receive the World Bank loans it depends on to service its debt (Isla 1993a, 1993b). More recently, the specter of domestic debt and deficit has been used to legitimize the imposition of the same neo-liberal restructuring on the populations of the rich nations as well (Isla, Miles and Molloy 1996). Government subsidies to big capital remain intact¹⁰ and are even augmented as a panoply of austerity measures are introduced in the economic South and North. In this way, external economic pressure in the South and economic fear and mystification in the North fuel the rapid and unequal shift of public and private wealth from the protected (local and national) sphere to the fettered (transnational) sphere.

These policies include selling off emergency food stores, ending price controls on staples, liberalizing trade, privatizing state enterprises, "downsizing" government offices, cutting back and privatizing social services, reducing corporate taxes, as well as weakening labour and wage protections including unemployment insurance, minimum wage and old age pensions.

In the rich industrial nations, public broadcasting, health care, child care, home care, public housing, welfare, unemployment insurance, education and research, transportation, environmental protection, garbage collection, public parks and amenities are cut, to name only some of the affected areas. The

9. Because of deteriorating terms of trade and massive interest rate jumps, the foreign debt of these nations continues to rise, though they have repaid the principal many times over. Interest rates jumped from 2.2% in the 1970s when the debts were originally incurred to 16.6% in 1982. The World Watch Institute reports that in 1971 the debt of developing countries was \$277 billion, by 1997 it had reached \$2,171 billion (2000a).

10. The Ontario Government, for instance, relieved Ontario Hydro's two main successor companies of \$21 billion of debt (Martin 2001).

resulting deterioration is weakening people's confidence in state provision. Accompanying talk of "crises" is fostering the idea that public services are always and necessarily "inefficient" and "unaffordable," and ultimately not viable. Public wealth is redefined as public cost, as a cause of impoverishment. Privatization is then offered as a "solution" to the bogus crises.

Railroads, mines, airlines, local transportation systems, postal services, water and power systems are being sold off to private owners, despite disastrous consequences.¹¹ Public services and government responsibilities such as education, health care, air traffic control, environmental monitoring, waste disposal and correctional services are being farmed out to private transnational corporations with less skilled, non-unionized, lower paid workers and lower (sometimes dangerous) standards of performance.¹² Even military functions are being privatized!¹³ Free trade and international trade agreements that prohibit preferential treatment of domestic businesses, ensure that ever larger, continually merging¹⁴ transnational corporations are free to acquire local businesses and privatized assets, and to provide services for profit anywhere in the world.

At the same time, new freedom of movement for capital, goods and services, though not labour, has allowed transnational corporations to shift their operations to little regulated, union free, low pay locations, undercutting wage levels and worker security in labour forces already threatened by aggressive business, by government "downsizing" and by reductions in workers' rights

11. In Cochabamba, Bolivia, recently local people rioted to force the government to take back newly privatized water services which had left them without water. The privatized rail service in Britain has cost lives and ruined the rail system. Privatization of power provision in California has led to energy blackouts and interrupted service.

12. In Ontario, the provincial government's hasty off-loading of the water monitoring function to private labs has been implicated in a serious outbreak of e-coli that caused seven deaths and much serious illness (Brennan 2001, Harris 2001).

13. When a Peruvian air force jet shot down a small plane on April 20, 2001 in the mistaken belief that it was carrying drug smugglers, it was revealed that the plane had first been spotted and wrongly identified by a US surveillance aircraft carrying employees of a private firm with a CIA contract. The incident, in which a young mother and her child died, cast light on the privatization of the drug war. A great deal of the \$1.3 billion allocated for Plan Colombia, the mixed programme of military and "development" aid intended to fund the "drug war" in Colombia is going to commercial ventures. DynCrop has a five-year \$200 million contract to fly lethal crop-dusters over Colombia. Other private businesses conduct aerial surveillance and have trained Colombian officers (Monbiot 2001).

14. Mergers of enormous conglomerates that would have been resisted earlier are now the norm, representing a concentration of already excessive corporate power. In 1970, some 50 conglomerates dominated the US mass media including newspapers, books, magazines, film, radio, television and recorded music; today, 10 corporations dominate (World Watch 2000a).

and benefits.¹⁵ Even though profits were at a 45-year high, between 1980 and 1993, the Fortune 500 companies cut their payrolls by more than 25%, eliminating nearly four million secure well paying jobs (*At Home* 2001).

The impact of these business practices on the growing number of economic losers is heightened by the simultaneous shredding of social safety nets as the neoliberal ideology plunders the protected sphere. This appropriation of public wealth by corporate capital is legitimized in an ideological climate that denies all communal life and redefines all public wealth as personal impoverishment (“tax theft”). Margaret Thatcher’s famous and extreme dictum that there is no such thing as “society,” only “individuals,” has become the defining orientation of governments that paint every group (except big business) as a “special interest” and entrench corporate rights over human rights. The anti-human presumptions that follow from this logic have become so pervasive that they go unnoticed:

Lay off workers in Britain and move your factory to the other side of the world - where labour is cheaper, unions are weaker and regimes are more brutal - and you are hailed as an entrepreneur. Arrive in Dover on the back of a lorry with the intention of working long hours for low pay and you will be branded “bogus” and labelled a scrounger. (Young 2001, p. 11)

Not surprisingly, in a system so skewed toward corporate interests, the power and wealth of large corporations now far outweigh all but the largest national economies. If the gross sales of corporations are considered as equivalent to the GDP of a country, we find that 51 of the world’s 100 largest economies are internal to corporations (Korten 1999). General Motors’ annual revenue is almost equal to the combined GDP of Nicaragua, Namibia, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, New Zealand and Ireland (Hertz 2001).

Vulnerability to social disintegration and ecological destruction varies by region, race, class and gender and the poor, and powerless suffer disproportionately. But everywhere today, people are impoverished and environments threatened, because transnational processes appropriate and destroy the wealth of the free and protected spheres, all under the guise of economic growth (Waring 1988, Douthwaite 1999). Basic requirements for sustaining life – food, water and shelter – are threatened for increasing numbers of people in both rich and poor nations.

15. In Ontario, Premier Mike Harris reduced social assistance by 22% as soon as he was elected in 1995. In Canada, the value of the minimum wage declined 48% between 1972 and 1992. In 1989, 87% of the unemployed were eligible for unemployment benefits; by 1996 tightening criteria had reduced eligibility to 40%.

A few are managing to ride the wave swamping so many, and they are getting richer as the rest get poorer.¹⁶ In keeping with general trends, between 1979 and 2000 in the US, the wealthiest 1% of the population doubled its share of assets from one fifth to almost one half (Beckett 2001). In Canada between 1984 and 1999, the net worth of the rich grew by 39% while the poorest saw no increase at all. Little wonder, then, that in 1994 there were 51% more poor children in Canada than in 1989 (Carey 2001).¹⁷ Worldwide, the number of people living on \$1 a day or less increased from 1.2 billion in 1987 to 1.5 billion in 2000 – 22% of the world's population. (Millennium Forum 2000).

As a result of this poverty, every single year 17 million people die of malnutrition and preventable diseases (Russell 2000). Millions of others must sell themselves or parts of themselves or their children to survive miserably, even for a short while. "Trade" is growing in blood, in body parts, in babies, in brides, domestic workers, child soldiers and sex workers: 200,000 children a year are sold into Africa's modern slave trade (Fenkiel 2001); 7 million Filipino women have left their country in search of work in Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East; 2 million girls between 5 and 15 years are sold or entrapped, or recruited every year into the "commercial sex market" (UN Population Fund 1997).

Human and non-human life has always been expendable in the mad race for profit. Today, capital's parasitic relationship to life is mushrooming wildly as corporate globalization dismantles democratic controls built over many decades of struggle. All over the world, unchecked neo-liberal "reform" is spreading deadly poverty and despair, provoking discontent and communal strife, and feeding militarism as it is at once violently resisted and more violently imposed.¹⁸

Not only are threats to life increasing everywhere, life itself is being controlled and commodified in entirely new ways through new reproductive technologies, genetic engineering and biotechnologies, the new frontier of patriarchal capitalist development. New intellectual property rights (IPRs), allowing the patenting of seeds, plants, animals and human genes, transform

16. A new 15 country study by the international organization Social Watch, documents widening income gaps in every country since the advent of free trade (www.socialwatch.org).

17. For extensive documentation of increasing economic polarization in Canada, see Yalnitzyan (1998).

18. The United Nations Social Summit in Copenhagen in 1995 estimated that the cost of the absolute eradication of poverty would be \$80 billion per year over 20 years, compared to worldwide military spending which was nearly \$800 billion in that year alone.

the very basis of life into private property and legalize corporate theft of knowledge, seeds and plants from local populations who have known and used and developed them over centuries. Vast areas of land are being expropriated as nature reserves and local populations are being expelled to “preserve” biodiversity for bioprospecting/biopiracy by or on behalf of corporations (Isla 2001). Attempts are being made to patent the neem plant and basmati rice in India, jasmine rice in Indonesia and brussel sprouts in the US, to name only a few of the already legion efforts to gain private ownership of existing popular knowledge and common wealth in genes and seeds.

Not all life patents, however, are for unchanged pre-existing life forms. New genetic forms are being manufactured. Monsanto corporation has developed and patented genetically modified seed designed to withstand the spraying of its proprietary weed killer, Roundup. It is illegal for farmers to re-use patented seed or to grow these seeds without signing a licensing agreement to pay royalties. This is strictly policed by toll-free snitch lines and private police who check farmers fields and crops. On March 29, 2001, in a case followed the world over, a judge ruled that a Canadian farmer, Percy Schmeiser, whose fields had been contaminated by Monsanto’s genetically modified canola seed, must pay the company thousands of dollars for violating its patent on genetically modified canola seed (RAFI 2001).

It is a small step from making it illegal for farmers and peasants to use and re-use seeds without paying a corporation, to developing a terminator seed, as Monsanto has done, whose sterility makes their use impossible. Although this “terminator technology” has been disavowed in the wake of international horror, it clearly reveals that corporations are not interested in owning life in order to protect it or to overcome scarcity or feed the world!¹⁹ Quite the reverse in fact. TNCs are actively removing the means of livelihood from individuals and communities all over the world as they construct a fragile, centrally

19. To counter the costly negative publicity of this terminator seed, corporations moved very cynically and very quickly (with public funding) to produce rice engineered with Vitamin A precursors. Extensive publicity billed this “Golden Rice” as a solution for widespread vitamin A deficiency in the third world. Free licenses “for humanitarian use” were granted for all intellectual property rights, and the rice is free to farmers earning under \$10,000 per year. Unfortunately, to gain the necessary Vitamin A from this rice, people would have to eat 3kg (uncooked weight) of rice every day, whereas the normal ration is only 100grams. The re-introduction of traditional diverse intercropping, originally displaced by expanded monocropping of rice, would improve people’s nutrition far more effectively than this genetically modified rice, but would be much less profitable.

owned and controlled global food system whose priority is profit, not food security for the rich or the poor.²⁰

III. FEMINIST STRUGGLES

Corporate globalization today is commodifying and colonizing not only the means of life, but life itself. Women's work and responsibility for the bearing and sustaining of (individual and communal) life has become the central ground of both patriarchal capitalist "development" and the construction of alternatives. Women in both economic South and North are especially vulnerable to the harms of corporate globalization, but particularly active in resisting it and in articulating alternatives.

The enforcement of the same neo-liberal agenda everywhere in the world links the fate of women in the North and South more closely than before.²¹ The fettered sphere's theft from the free and protected spheres predominantly targets women (and their children) everywhere. When what cannot be turned to profit is downloaded from the protected to the free sphere, it is predominantly women who bear the extra burden, without pay. Thus, women's lives

20. Even those whose needs (and whims) are being fulfilled in this global market are becoming dangerously dependent on increasingly vulnerable monocrop sources of chemicalized and genetically modified foods produced in fast-deteriorating soils with threatened water supplies.

Soil erosion is a direct consequence of intensive mono-cropping. The UN estimates that 40% of the world's agricultural land has been badly degraded because of erosion, nutrient depletion, and water stress from agrottoxins and monocropping (Schreiner 2001). The Soil Conservation Service has estimated that intensive monocropping leads to the erosion of over 30 billion tons of topsoil in North America each year (WOW Foods 2001).

In 1995, Americans spent \$10.4 billion on pesticides. The US Environmental Protection Agency estimates that pesticides contaminate ground water in 38 US states, polluting the primary source of drinking water for over half the country's population (WOW Foods 2001). Agribusiness is not the only form of "development" (economic growth) threatening water supplies. Tourism is the world's fastest-growing industry. An 18-hole golf course in a dry country can consume as much water as a town of 10,000 inhabitants. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has estimated that in 55 days, 100 tourists use enough water to grow rice to feed 100 villagers for 15 years (Addley 2001).

21. "Corporate globalization has dismantled the welfare state in the former 'first world,' state socialism in the former 'second world' and state sovereignty in the former 'third world.' All these worlds are being merged into one global configuration that pits an ever growing majority forced to live in misery against an ever shrinking minority 'enjoying' relative privilege behind barbed wire fences. Distinctions between North and South, and among nation states are breaking down, with rapidly expanding pockets of majority world 'underdevelopment' springing up in the former metropolises and corresponding enclaves of minority world 'development' establishing themselves in the former colonies." (Faraclas 2001)

and livelihoods are disproportionately at risk today, and women themselves are suffering disproportionate increases in work.

In the economic South women are the protectors and propagators of the seeds being appropriated or patented by the transnationals. When subsistence resources are switched to production for the market, they generally shift from women's to men's hands. Young women provide the bulk of the labour in the *maquiladoras* and micro enterprises springing up to take advantage of cheap and unprotected labour. And women bear the brunt of social disintegration and poverty. They are sold (or sell themselves) into marriage and are trafficked (or traffick themselves) in the sex trade. They make up the vast majority of migrant workers and, with their children, account for 80% of all refugees.

When education is cut, more girls than boys lose access. Women depend more than men on social transfer payments and public services such as transportation, and they suffer unequally when these are reduced. Women everywhere are the ones who must care for the young, the sick and the old when child care, health care, mental hospitals and old age homes are not available. When social service, health care and education jobs are cut or contracted to the private sector, women lose a large proportion of their all too few "good jobs" even as they shoulder the bulk of the unpaid work needed to compensate for the individual, communal and environmental costs of "economic growth."

Women in local communities around the world are challenging economic and religious fundamentalisms as they claim their freedom and affirm and protect life. They are resisting those who would steal their knowledge and seeds and transfer resources from subsistence production to production for profit. They are preserving social and public services, organizing labour in sweat shops, protecting the environment, opposing violence and war, confronting tyranny, and defending and extending democracy.²² What's more, feminists are building regional and global networks around all these issues; in the process, they affirm the core values of human and non-human life and of biological and cultural diversity in opposition to the homogenizing economic growth whose only catalyst is profit.

22. For accounts of women's local activism see: Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies (1999); Davies (1983, 1987); Garland (1988); Kishwar and Vanita (1984); MATCH International Centre (1990); Mbilinyi and Meena (1991); Morgan (1984); Ricciutelli et al. (1998); and Schuler (1986, 1990, 1992).

A few examples of these many regional and international networks include: AAWORD (Association of African Women for Research and Development), AWRAN (Asian Women's Human Rights Network), CAFRA (Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action), DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era), Diverse Women for Diversity, FINRRAGE (Feminists International Network of Resistance to Reproductive Technologies and Genetic Engineering), Indigenous Women's Network, International Network Against Female Sexual Slavery and Trafficking in Women, International Women and Health Network, ISIS (Women's International Information and Communication Service), Latin American Feminist Encuentros, Network on Women's Human Rights, Women Against Fundamentalism, WEDO (Women Environment and Development Organization), Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

As I have shown in my book *Integrative Feminisms: Building Global Visions 1960s-1990s* (1996), through these myriad locally grounded international networks, the global women's movement is building a new form of multi-centred movement that promotes solidarity through diversity rather than sameness. Feminists are imagining and thus creating the potential for new forms of non-homogenizing universality. The global feminist movement is neither uncentred, nor decentred and points to the possibility as it builds the capacity for alternative liberating global relations. Corinne Kumar calls this a "new universalism":

not a universalism that denies the many and affirms the one, not a eurocentric universalism; not a patriarchal universalism. A universalism that will not deny the accumulated experience and knowledge of all past generations [...] that [...] will not accept the imposition of any monolithic, "universal" structures under which it is presumed all other peoples must be subsumed [...] A new universalism that will challenge the universal mode, the logic of our development, science, technology, militarization, the nuclear option. A new universalism that will respect the plurality of different societies - of their philosophy, of their ideology, their traditions and cultures, one that will be rooted in the particular, one which will develop in the context of the dialectics of different civilizations, birthing a new cosmology (D'Souza 1992, p. 44)

At the heart of these new human possibilities lies a rejection of the dominance of white western men, of western modernization and of capitalist "development." However, feminists affirming diverse knowledges and cultures being marginalized and destroyed by these processes are not simply defending tradition. They are promoting transformation and forward thinking, because at the same time they are affirming the knowledge and work of women, often devalued and disregarded in both traditional and modern cultures.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, feminists from the South (Anand 1980, Antrobus 1983, Dakar 1982, ISIS 1983) and North (Boulding 1980, Ehrenreich and English 1979, Leghorn and Parker 1981) from their different locations, rejected profit centred development and capitalism; they instead proposed alternative, women associated starting places and values for humanity as a whole. In the early 1980s, for instance, DAWN, a third world women's network, articulated (among others) a feminist project grounded in female-associated values and priorities:

The women's movement... can have an ethic drawn from women's daily lives. At its deepest, it is not an effort to play "catch up" with the competitive aggressive "dog-eat-dog" spirit of the dominant system. It is, rather, an attempt to convert men and the system to the sense of responsibility, nurturance, openness, and rejection of hierarchy that are part of our vision. (Sen and Grown 1987)²³

In the U.S., Deirdre English and Barbara Ehrenreich (1979) wrote similarly:

We refuse to remain on the margins of society, and we refuse to enter that society on its own terms... The human values that women were assigned to preserve [must] become the organizing principles of society. The vision that is implicit in feminism [is that of] a society organized around human needs... There are no human alternatives. The Market, with its financial abstractions, deformed science and obsession with dead things... must be pushed back to the margin. And the "womanly" values of community and caring must rise to the center as the only human principle. (1979, p. 342)

Feminists in all regions are seeking to transform the dominant system rather than enter it on equal terms. They reject hierarchical, competitive, market ruled, patriarchal capitalism as less than human, even anti-human. They have come to see that what is called "modernization" in the economic North and "development" in the economic South depends on processes of often violent colonization of nature, women, workers, indigenous peoples and traditional cultures and communities. And they are articulating ecological and anti-colonial, women-centred perspectives that link all these struggles (Mies 1986, Mies *et al.* 1987, Shiva 1989).

CONCLUSION

The consensus emerging among the world's feminists on these transformative perspectives was evident in practice in 1991 when 1,500 women from

23. This influential document was developed collectively by DAWN members and circulated in unpublished form in feminist groups and at feminist gatherings before 1987.

54 countries met in Miami at the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet. Building on earlier dialogue in an array of networks, participants produced a powerful and visionary set of regional statements and a collective analysis and set of positions known as *Women's Action Agenda 21*, in preparation for the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED or The Earth Summit) (World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet 1992). Collections of feminist writing from Latin America (Oliviera and Corral 1992) and Asia (Second Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Women 1994), to name only two of many, confirm that these world wide feminist visions and perspectives are shared and are shaping women's practice around the world.

Women are not the only group or movement criticizing not only economic growth as a measure of wealth and well being, but also colonialism and capitalism. But feminist perspectives are essential in designing alternatives to corporate globalization and have yet to be properly heard, understood, and acknowledged by other movements (Miles 2000). Women stand at the core of the beleaguered protected and free spheres. Their historical and mandated responsibility for individual and communal life anchors their diverse global networks, their resistance to patriarchal corporate globalization and their visions of a life-affirming future. A future fully human society will necessarily be a "feminized" society, where women have more power, gender is less determining, and women's work and responsibility for sustaining life become a defining social priority shared by all.

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