Global Apartheid, Environmental Degradation, And Women's Activism For Sustainable Well-Being: A Conceptual And Theoretical Overview

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ABSTRACT: This essay offers a conceptual and theoretical overview of perspectives held by feminist researchers and other critical social analysts on the economic and ecological crises that are intensifying under the neoliberal restructuring of global capitalism. The most problematic effects of globalization are engendering gross disparities in wealth, health, and life expectancy that disproportionately compromise the well-being of women and the families and communities that depend on their knowledge and labor. The parameters for a feminist political ecology are provided along with an examination of the forms of scattered resistance and transnational activism emerging in response to global apartheid.

Introduction

The theme of the 15th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (ICAES), held in Florence,

Italy during the summer of 2003, was "Humankind/Nature Interaction: Past, Present, and Future." The Commission on the Anthropology of Women, a unit of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES), addressed this theme in sessions that focused on the impact of globalization, transnationalism, and neoliberalism on the environment, economic conditions, and women's strategies for promoting collective well-being. The Commission's intent was to contribute perspectives that would underscore the significance of social analysis that is cognizant of gender, race, caste, class, and (trans)national identity as important axes of power and inequality affecting the kinds of relationships that human beings develop with the natural world as a culturally mediated and socialized biopolitical field. This essay offers a broad conceptual, theoretical, and historical context for situating this endeavor and for illuminating the salience of its interrelated concerns.

The Commission on the Anthropology of Women is made up largely of sociocultural anthropologists who work on questions related to gender and interrelated differences from a variety of theoretical and analytical perspectives broadly conceived as *feminist*. That is to say, our inquiry is, ultimately, related to advocacy for women's rights, conceptualized as integral to an expanded notion of human rights. In anthropological analysis, both gender and feminism are concepts that require qualification because of the diversity of ideas and the competing stakes in "the anthropology of women," the complex intellectual grounds upon which the Commission operates. The notion of feminism is used here in an encompassing way meant to include a wide range of ideological, cultural, and political positions, including some that would appear to represent contestations of the label as it is often used. My colleagues and I are interested in broadening the scope and parameters of how "feminism" is defined because of the importance of considering multiply inflected voices and forms of

praxis that are, in varying ways, conscious of gender as a relation of power and opposed to patriarchy and all forms of sexism. Included in my understanding, then, are perspectives and struggles that situate gender in wider matrices of domination in which racial, ethnic, class, and caste stratifications along with pervasive heterosexist regimes and ageist hierarchies coexist and operate simultaneously to structure social relations, naturalize hegemonic elements of culture, and constrain life chances.

Kamala Visweswaran decenters gender in her claim that in the world beyond white middle class, Western women, the struggle for women's equality and human rights falls under the plural umbrellas of nationalism, Pan-Africanism, socialism, Islamism, and so on (1997: 616). She urges us to "understand gender as not the endpoint of analysis but rather as an entry point into complex systems of meaning and power," recognizing that "there are other equally valid entry points for feminist work" (Visweswaran 1997: 616), work that promotes advocacy for women's rights along with gender and sexual equality. Such a decentered approach is useful for framing the kinds of cross-cultural and internationalist dialogues that the IUAES Commission is committed to facilitating.

Interrogating Global Apartheid

The title and analytical focus of this essay–and of the ICAES session it was originally written for–was inspired by a speech made by the President of the Republic of South Africa before delegates to the World Summit for Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg in August 2002. Thabo Mbeke urged the delegates to come to terms with the inextricable links that exist among global restructuring, deepening poverty, and the growing destruction of the natural environment. He underscored that the so-called New World Order, a world system

dominated by a neoliberal agenda, is an unsustainable system of *global apartheid* in which there is poverty for many and prosperity for only a few. He stated that "[a] global human society . . . characterized by islands of wealth, surrounded by a sea of poverty, is unsustainable. " He also "criticized the failure of governments to act on pledges made 10 years ago in Rio de Janeiro to pursue environmentally friendly prosperity" (The New York Times, nytimes.com, article: "At Earth Summit, Mbeki Slams 'Islands of Wealth'" Aug. 26, 2002).

His choice of words, specifically his use of the apartheid metaphor, cannot be explained simply because he is South African and, thus, accustomed to an apartheid- or anti-apartheid centered discourse. The concept of apartheid is being employed by a number of social analysts and critics, myself (Harrison 2002) included, who are concerned with the disparities of wealth, health, and life expectancy that are growing throughout the world today. Zooming in close to home in the U. S. , Chuck Collins and Felice Veskel, authors of ECONOMIC APARTHEID IN AMERICA: A PRIMER OF INEQUALITY AND INSECURITY (2000), argue that socioeconomic conditions have declined in the U. S. since the "thirty years following WWII," when:

> [p]rosperity was better shared among almost everyone in society than it is today. . . During the last few decades, the economic rules of the game were changed, by wealthy individuals and corporations, and they can be changed back by people like us (Collins and Veskel 2004: 127).

They go on to say that economic restructuring has given rise to:

> new pressures and . . . alarming trends [such as:] less free time and more working hours, fewer households with health insurance, rising personal debt, declining personal

> savings, diminishing retirement security, growing num-
> ber of temporary jobs, and rising college costs (129).

Collins and Veskel's description of the U. S. mirrors the international picture that June Nash (1994) draws in her analysis of the declining subsistence security that recent patterns of global integration are causing. This problematic trend is threatening to eliminate the last frontiers of subsistence, notably the subsistence systems and biologically diverse environments of indigenous peoples, whose knowledges and traditional resource-use practices have long embodied principles that sustain and renew the habitats within which they have lived.

According to advocacy researchers Salih Booker and William Minter (2001: 11): "the [apartheid] concept captures fundamental characteristics of the current world order missed by such labels as . . . globalization or even corporate globalization. " They argue that global apartheid is not just a metaphor; it is a reality marked by the operation of "undemocratic institutions that systematically generate economic inequality." Their definition of global apartheid is:

> an institutional system of minority rule whose attributes include: differential access to basic human rights; wealth and power structured by race and place; structural racism, embedded in global economic processes, political institutions and cultural assumptions; and the international practice of double standards that assume inferior rights to be appropriate for certain 'others', defined by location, origin, race or gender.

Because they and their dependents constitute the majority of the world's poor, 70% to be exact, women suffer the brunt of global apartheid's assaults, whether those assaults are manifest culturally, politically, economically, or environmentally. Women's critical and creative responses to these varying forms of structural violence are the focus of this essay, which will offer a range of answers to the question of what gender has to

do with humankind/nature interaction and also the question of the role women are playing in redefining and expanding the terms of political struggle for sustainable environments and democratic strategies for economic development.

The Political Ecology of Conjuring Profits

A thematic focus on "Humankind/Nature Interaction" provides us with a valuable opportunity and mandate to rethink, from a multi-axial or intersectional perspective, the broader ecological context within which collective human life is currently being restructured worldwide. This process is proceeding according to the complex constraints and possibilities that exist in the early 21st century world: that is, the constraints and possibilities being presented by the restructuring of the market, the state, and civil society. The interrelated concepts of ecology and ecosystem denote the interactions among all living organisms and between them and their nonliving environment. This interaction is basic to an understanding of the dynamics of nature and all the material constituents of the natural world. It is also basic to understanding the human condition, the subject of anthropological inquiry.

Sociocultural anthropologists have interrogated the notion of "nature," often shedding light on the gendered meanings invested in it and examining the cultural constructs with which the world of organisms and nonliving natural phenomena is interpreted and represented. Some feminist anthropologists have privileged a radical constructivist notion of culture, neglecting the empirical reality of "nature" and "biology," lest women's subordination be attributed to their natural endowment as females according to the logic of an essentializing determinism. However, a critical rethinking of biology and nature, freed from the dangers of essentialism, is warranted. Beyond interpreting the symbolic constructions and representa-

tions that may figure prominently in sociocultural discourses, do feminist anthropologists have anything to say about the concrete natural environment and our responsibility to renew and sustain it for the benefit of human life in the new millennium? How should we think about nature as we move from the limits of dichotomous conceptualizations (of nature/culture, humankind/nature) to a dialectical mode of analysis? Is not "nature" socialized and reconfigured by humankind's continual cultural impact? Indeed, is not humankind a part of nature and nature a part of human social life? Where do we draw the boundary between humankind and nature, or should we think in terms of boundaries rather than in terms of the kinds of interrelationships, affinities, and reintegration that can potentially counter the cumulative effects of exploitation, estrangement, and alienation that have assaulted the well-being of both nature and the majority of human beings? How can examining these questions through multi-focal lenses crafted to discern significant axes of difference, inequality, and power be helpful?

I raise the issue of reconciling interpretive/symbolic analyses of representations of nature with more ecologically grounded perspectives, because critical biocultural anthropologists (including biological anthropologists who take sociocultural anthropology seriously) have begun to do just that. They are using a framework informed by useful insights from anthropological political economy and political ecology to rethink the interactive effects of culture, power, and structured inequalities on nature and human biologies, especially as the latter are evidenced in the patterns of compromised health and social suffering distributed across the globe. In their view, human biology (or biolo*gies* as they prefer) is/are thoroughly socialized, embedded in historically specific sociocultural contexts shaped by the structured inequalities, ecological processes, and political dynamics that human agents are compelled to negotiate (Goodman and Leatherman 1998). In my view,

this theoretical framework is amenable to feminist analysis, as suggested by a couple of the chapters in BUILDING A NEW BIOCULTURAL SYNTHESIS, where this new perspective is presented (Martin 1998; Crooks 1998).

As dichotomies, humankind/nature and culture/nature are heuristic devices for making sense of the interaction, relationship, symbiosis or the conflict, antagonism, and rift between the natural environment and the singular species of organisms within the ecosystem that has proven itself capable of assaulting nature and, hence, its own long-range "reproductive success," if I may appropriate a term from evolutionary theory. According to John Bellamy Foster (2002), who has written about ecology from a theoretical perspective that draws heavily on Karl Marx, human relations with the earth and all its resources have undergone a "metabolic rift" with the development of the capitalist system of production and exchange. While environmental degradation existed before the rise of capitalism, "the goal to conjure profits out of the thin air (by speculation and trade" [Magdoff 2002: 1]) has clearly exacerbated the problem, taking it to its logical extreme by making recurrent crisis a byproduct of capital accumulation and the workings of the free – but not fair– market system. In this context, human beings have come to be estranged from the natural conditions that constitute the very basis of their collective existence. This problem of alienation has undermined sustainability. A political economy based on "accumulation without end, rooted in exchange value as opposed to use value" (Foster 2002: 7) is a major assault against the renewability and restoration of the earth. This problematic pattern promotes *naturism*, the unjustified exploitation of the nonhuman environment (Warren 1997a: xiii).

The political economy of capitalism, and currently of neoliberal capitalism, has engendered an ecological crisis that is degrading if not altogether destroying the environment (Foster 1994 cited in MacEwan 1999: 234). This crisis is manifested

in wasteful patterns of production and consumption, soil deple-
tion, toxic residues from industry, global warming, depletion
of the ozone layer, water pollution, including the contamina-
tion of oceans, and even "international shipping and dump-
ing of waste materials" (MacEwan 1999: 234). Foster makes
the argument that "[e]cological degradation, like imperialism,
is as basic to capitalism as the pursuit of profits itself" (Foster
2002: 15). Contrary to the belief of some ecological Marxists,
this crisis will not necessarily lead to a collapse of capitalism,
because capitalism is finding ways to adapt to and capitalize
on the crisis by creating new businesses and markets for clean
water, air, and waste management (Foster 2002: 11). Foster
warns us that

> the dangers of a deepening ecological problem are *all
> the more serious* because the system does not have an inter-
> nal (or external) regulatory mechanism that causes it to
> reorganize (Foster 2002: 11).

Pathologies of Power at Globalization's Neoliberal Moment

Ecological crisis does not exist outside of conditions that
produce economic crisis. In fact, plant and soil scientist Fred
Magdoff (2002) characterizes these interrelated conditions as
capitalism's twins, which have the pathologizing power to
exacerbate social suffering and compromise human biologies
as reflected in troubling patterns of public health throughout
the world. These crises are not the outcome of natural law play-
ing itself out at people's expense; they are the outcome of ma-
terial conditions created in contexts of grossly unequal power
that lead to undemocratic development strategies that privi-
lege transnational corporations and the market above the rights
and basic needs of the majority of human beings (MacEwan
1999: 2). This growing problem stems from what physician and
anthropologist Paul Farmer characterizes as "pathologies of

power," whose structural violence is a major threat to the kind of humankind/nature interaction that engenders sustainable well-being.

Today what is called the New World Order is a regime of triumphalist truth claims that promote a particular kind of political economy, namely one that is being restructured within a historically specific moment of globalization. According to anthropologist Ted Lewellen:

> contemporary globalization is the increasing flow of trade, finance, culture, ideas, and people brought about by the sophisticated technology of communications and travel and by the worldwide spread of neoliberal capitalism, and it is the local and regional adaptations to and resistance against these flows (2002: 7-8).

These flows or the processes that Lewellen describes are "multidimensional, multispeed, and disjuncted," and through their combined force, "the market, state, and civil society" are "(re)constructed" (Marchand and Runyan 2000: 7). Anthropologists and other fieldwork-based social researchers emphasize that these processes are " generated from the everyday activities and negotiations of diverse individuals, communities, governmental bodies, and transnational coalitions" (Naples 2002: 8). In other words, everyday life is not just the passive target of global forces from above. It represents one of the multiple sites and levels where global restructuring is generated through human agency's dialectical interplay with the structural power of global capitalism's expanding but "scattered hegemonies" (Naples 2002: 1, 8).

In Lewellen's view, globalization per se is not a new phenomenon. Aspects of it can be traced back hundreds of years. However, scholars tend to locate the emergence of the neoliberal variety of globalization to more recent times. Sociologist Nancy Naples (2002: 10) claims that "[t]he global economy has been undergoing a process of restructuring since

the early 1970s. " Around that time, "big companies in the West resorted to international subcontracting to survive" the oil crisis. As a result, a new:

> geographical division of labor [with] far-reaching repercussions [was developed]. . . The knowledge-intensive aspects of the production process remained lodged in the West, but those that were labor-intensive shifted [to the Global South] (Naples 2002: 10-11).

Naples goes on to explain that:

> [i]n the 1980s as big business emphasized the importance of managerial flexibility and decentralized production, corporate strategies in the West sought a more flexible workforce to undermine the power of traditional unions (Naples 2002: 11, quoting Jill Sterns).

The features of economic restructuring that have crystallized since then include:

> a decline in organized labor and formal labor contracts; increasing internationalization of capital; growth in informal and part-time employment; loss of local economic and natural resources; cutbacks in social provisioning associated with the so-called welfare state; restructuring of women's work; and a growing disparity between classes (Naples 2002: 11).

Lewellen takes the view that globalization's most recent moment began to take shape about 20 years after the oil crisis in the immediate wake of the Cold War. Since then neoliberal policies, such as those embodied in the structural adjustment programs and export-oriented development strategies that the U. S. government, IMF, World Bank, and World Trade Organization have touted, have reigned over the Global South, the former Eastern Bloc, and the world at large as though there are no alternatives. In this context, the purported answer to

the whole world's economic problems has been to embrace the unregulated free market and privatization, and to reassign many state functions to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the WTO, and the IMF. While during the 1990s neoliberal policies were consolidated and globalized, it was a decade earlier when Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher created the international political climate that allowed an extreme form of neoliberalism to diffuse (Lewellen 2002: 8-9).

Generally conceived of as an ideology or philosophy, neoliberalism can also be viewed as a cultural system that globalization is spreading. Anthropologists Catherine Kingfisher and Michael Goldsmith (2001: 716) define it in the following terms:

> Neoliberalism is perhaps best conceived of as a cultural system that makes certain claims about the economy, the proper role of the state, and the nature of personhood that in turn serve to organize society in highly gendered ways. . . . [N]eoliberal culture depends on a theory of economic individualism. . . [entailing] a particular conceptualization of personhood, on the basis of which a unique vision of society is constructed, namely one with a minimalist state whose role is simply to enable the free exchange of goods and services between rational, independent individuals.

This concept of the individual is Western and fairly recent in historical origin. Kingfisher and Goldsmith (2001: 716) go on to explain individualism as a cultural construct, underscoring that:

> [n]eoliberalism. . . implicitly challenges the view that personhood is socially and culturally constructed by asserting that the autonomous and rational monad of Western thought is natural and that any other versions of personhood are more ideological than cultural.

Because their focus is on the globalization of a neoliberal approach to welfare reform, they emphasize that neoliberalism operates as a form of governance:

> characterized by an international and patterned shift in the direction of increasing marketization, a redrawing of the public/private distinction, valorization of possessive individualism, and decreasing state expenditure (but sometimes paradoxically, with increasing state interference) in social arenas. . . [There is also] a strategy of deregulating wages and the labor market, combined with a certain degree of welfare state erosion (2001: 716).

Although powerful, neoliberalism is not at all monolithic as an ideology or culture or policy. Double standards exist in how market liberalization is actually implemented; recently, disputes have arisen over the U. S. government's breaching of WTO agreements to protect its steel market (e.g., "WTO rules U.S. Tariffs on Steel are Illegal," International Herald Tribune, July 12-13, 2003, p. 1,5). Marc Edelman's (1999) ethnography of peasant social movements in Costa Rica demonstrates how the Costa Rican state was forced to soften the effects of the IMF mandate by salvaging more of the social safety net than the IMF had prescribed. Like this case illustrates, there are a variety of forms, "caveats, qualifications, and modifications of the doctrine," even within the IMF and World Bank, where revisionism was a feature of the 1990s (MacEwan 1999: 8). For example, in response to criticism from below, there was an attempt to reform structural adjustment to give it a more "human face." Accordingly, it became common to fund projects that seemed to valorize indigenous knowledge, appropriate technologies, and sustainable development. Despite all this, these institutions' basic approach remained the same. Arthur MacEwan (1999: 10) points out that:

> [t]he Bank and IMF have a great deal of power over many countries, and they use it to push neoliberal prin-

ciples and policies. The revisionism, however, complicates the task of developing a critique, because it "obscure[s] the core of the ideology."

Substantiating the subtleties of this point, Manisha Desai (2002: 19) discusses how the World Bank and development agencies like the USAID end up "[prioritizing] the market rather than women's economic and social empowerment" in the WID (women in development) microcredit programs these organizations implement in various developing countries.

MacEwan argues that neoliberalism, which has promoted "unregulated private decision-making," is a major obstacle to democratic economic development. This market-centered philosophy is not new. It can be traced back to 19th century classical economic liberalism that viewed the market as the "guiding instrument" with which to organize economic life. Philosopher John McMurtry (1998), however, expresses the view that neoliberalism actually inverts the values of neoclassical economics. Adam Smith's idea was that the "wealth of nations" was to be "achieved through the market" and the pursuit of profit. McMurtry insists that in Smith's view, "the market and its monetary self-interest" were "servants of the public good" (Mc Murtry 1998: 321). Neoliberalism, however, reverses this ethic by making "nations, people, and environment. . . the means of stockholders' money profit" (Mc Murtry 1998: 321). In other words:

> all that exists is conceived of as a servant of corporations competing against one another in the global market to maximize capital returns. Life has become the instrument of private capital expansion, rather than investors' capital being a means to enable human life. The world of value has been turned upside down (Mc Murtry 1998 321).

McMurtry (1998: 325) makes the strong argument that the global market is a means of life destruction rather than a means of life. Its logic is pathological. This human-made predicament

can be unmade and a civil common built as an alternative "life ground of value. " This life ground would "enable life by the basic resources of life being available to all its members. " He then asserts that women are the mothers of the civil common, because their "traditional work is the undergirding . . . of all work" (McMurtry 1998: 374). We will return to some of the contributions women are making in building a civil common in subsequent sections below.

What Does Gender Have To Do with All This?

Neoliberal Political Economy as a Feminist Issue

There is a substantial body of research that documents the gendered socioeconomic environments produced, in good measure, by global restructuring, specifically market deregulation, structural adjustment programs, export processing zones, and other forms of extraverted development. As indicated above, these conditions are having profound impacts on women, their families, and communities all around the world. In my own work in Jamaica, I have examined how the neoliberal climate, brought on by the imposition of structural adjustment:

> brought only a deepened poverty to the folk who people the streets and alleys of slum and shantytown neighborhoods like. . . [the one I have studied since the late 1970s. The] deepening poverty is reflected. . . in a serious decline in the conditions of public health. The implementation of structural adjustment has brought about alarming reductions in government health-care expenditures and promoted the privatization of more costly and less accessible medical care. Those most heavily burdened by the impact of these deteriorating social conditions and capital-centered policies are women. . . who serve as the major 'social shock absorbers' mediating the crisis at the

> local level of households and neighborhoods (Harrison 1997: 452).

Economic austerity is also manifest in higher levels of formal unemployment, as those who were formerly employed in the public sector have seen their jobs eliminated by cutbacks or by the privatization of state-run sectors of the economy. There has been a growing dependence on informal sector work and transnational flows, such as the remittances that come from kin who live abroad and the activities of posses that traffic illegal drugs from Jamaica to foreign markets in North America and the UK.

As feminists such as Cynthia Enloe (1989), Peggy Antrobus (1989) and Pamela Sparr (1994) have argued:

> globalization [is] fundamentally gendered [and] marked by a masculinist logic. Present-day strategies to adjust. . . and facilitate capital accumulation implicate constructions of femininity and masculinity that. . . legitimate the superexploitation of the productive and reproductive labor of women, with women of color bearing the heaviest burdens and being the most vulnerable targets of structural violence–the symbolic, psychological, and physical assaults against human subjectivities, physical bodies, and sociocultural integrity that emanate from situations and institutions structured in social, political, and economic dominance (Harrison 1997: 457).

The implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPS) in Jamaica and in many other national contexts around the world has entailed "some variant of the following features:

> (1) cutbacks in public spending to balance government budgets and service debts; (2) monetary policies designed to fight inflation by restricting the money supply (and incomes); (3) the selling of government enterprises (privatization) in an attempt to balance government budgets and improve business production efficiency; and (4) the shift of manufacturing and agricultural sectors toward

> production for export instead of the domestic market in
> order to improve international balances . . . (Desai 2002:
> 16).

Manisha Desai (2002) writes that mandated "packages" such as these have had four major effects on women all over the world. First, these policies have produced a "racialized feminized proletariat" (Naples 2002: 9), which has become a central component of the global labor force. Women's waged employment has grown but is concentrated in "the low-paid service sector" (Desai 2002: 17). Women's wage labor is also visible in free trade or export processing zones. Second, women's participation in the informal economy has increased as well, because formal unemployment rates have gone up. This unregulated sphere is "an equal opportunity employer" but offers work with no benefits and income that is typically well below the poverty line. Third, women's unpaid work at home has increased considerably in the wake of the state's retreat from safety net provisioning. Fourth and last, women's dependence on the natural environment for sustenance makes them especially vulnerable to economic and territorial displacement as more acreage is being "appropriated for global production . . . and environmental damage escalates" (Desai 2002: 17). The growing problem of environmental refugees that Lewellen (2002: 173) discusses has a significant gendered aspect.

While the literature offers graphic exposés of the damage global apartheid has done, it also provides evidence of women's resilience, resistance, and affirmative mobilization to recreate conditions for well-being and rehumanization. Returning to the Jamaica case, export processing zone workers took risks to organize for better wages and work conditions. Women in impoverished neighborhoods mobilized their social networks to contest political violence and violent crime, particularly that associated with drug gangs. With men who were not affiliated

with gangs, women challenged the "paramilitary masculinity of political gangs, drug posses, and their turfs and war zones" (Harrison 1997: 461). Women claimed local spaces and converted them into:

> the sanctuaries, safety zones, and neutral interfaces . . . of such nonpartisan fields of power as open markets, schools, churches, mutual-aid associations, and some 'yards' or co-residential compounds. . . . Peace-making women, similar in many respects to the 'centerwomen' that Sacks (1984) analyzes in the context of workplace struggles in North Carolina, mobilize social power rooted in the familiaristic values and skills that enable and empower them to engage in effective communication, goal and priority setting, decision making, and conflict mediation and resolution (Harrison 1997: 461).

Whether in the form of networks, action groups, cooperatives, social movements, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), poor women in Jamaica and elsewhere in the world are expressing the urgent concerns and grievances of households, communities, and the informal sector in ways that the established political parties and trade unions have not. It is not surprising that in view of "the specific ways in which the [economic] crisis impinges upon women" they "have been among the first to protest and organize in new ways" (Harrison 1997: 464).

In contexts where open organizing is difficult, such as in export processing zones (EPZs), women have found alternative ways, namely forms of cultural resistance, to make their grievances known (e. g., Ong 1987). Women working in the informal sector have found resourceful ways to organize around their needs and interests. For example, in India The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) arose in the early 1970s "as one of the first organizations to define the various informal activities of women. . . as *work*" (Desai 2002: 19). Look-

ing beyond South Asia, Desai (2002: 20) goes on to point out that:

> [i]n addition to local networks, self-employed women, like their counterparts in the EPZs, have also formed transnational networks such as GROOTS (Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood) International, primarily to learn new ideas, share best practices, and influence local and international policy making around informal sector issues.

Organizations and networks of organizations at local, multi-local, national, and transnational levels have emerged also to address the tremendous quality of life or "public provision" issues that SAPs have exacerbated. The growth of transnational solidarity networks, linking unions, social movements, and NGOs, has been significant. While this trend has had many constructive outcomes, there are also problems. One major problem lies in the:

> increasing NGO-ization of women's movements with its attendant decline in radical critique and an increasing role in serving as experts and implementers of government and international donors' programs. Some NGOs are no more than fronts for the government, while others . . . maintain links with movements and try to work both within and outside the system. These NGOs simultaneously provide a critique of government agencies and actions as well as mobilize to gain resources for empowering women (Desai 2002: 18).

Desai (2002: 31) claims that, while transnational feminist solidarities "often reproduce existing inequalities" and assume a market-friendly stance, when they emerge from "specific political and social local movement contexts" and are not "top-down orchestrations," they play an important part in strengthening on-the-ground struggles against economic and environmental injustices (Desai 2002: 24). The most successful organi-

zations and alliances are cognizant of the problems that power imbalances present, and they find ways to struggle against them according to an ethic of love and compassion.

Ecology and Environmental Justice as Feminist Issues

As pointed out earlier, global capitalism has created the conditions for inseparable twin crises, both economic and eco-logical. The latter crisis, like the former, can be viewed pro-ductively through a gendered lens. Ecofeminist Karen Warren (1997b) writes from this perspective, explaining why nature and the naturist problems assaulting it are amenable to femi-nist analysis. She reminds us that the very language used to describe nature is feminized: Mother Nature, Mother Earth. Warren elaborates by pointing out that sexist-naturist language reflects the assumption that women and nonhuman nature are inferior to that which is male or masculine, the presumed stan-dard for humanity. Animalistic terms are often used to describe women and their body parts: foxes, chicks, bitches, birdbrains, pussies, mother hens, and old bats. Warren explains that:

> [a]nimalizing or naturalizing women in a (patriarchal) culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans (men) thereby reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status. Similarly, language which feminizes nature . . . where women are viewed as subordinate and inferior reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature (Warren 1997b: 12)

Beyond the symbols expressed in language, Warren under-scores that "understanding the empirical relationship between women and nature improves our understanding of women's subordination" (Warren 1997b: 5). That empirical relationship is evidenced in several ways. First, women are often more de-pendent on natural resources as sources of food, fuel, income,

and products for the home (e. g. , household utensils, gardens, medicines). Second, when environmental degradation occurs, women and their households are commonly the most immediate victims. For instance, resource depletion, as in that which ensues from deforestation, forces women to walk great distances to find alternative sources of fuel wood and fodder. When women's traditional sources of income are eliminated by naturist conditions, orthodox development projects fail to address their household-based needs. The masculinist bias and undemocratic nature of development are rampant and only beginning to be redressed by efforts to mainstream gender. Third, women often face traditional taboos and legal constraints that men do not in their access to and management of environmental resources. Fourth, indigenous technical knowledge (ITK) frequently lies within women's practical consciousness and experience. This knowledge emerges from their everyday lived experiences as managers of natural resources and as small-scale primary producers. Quite commonly ITK is invisible to development officers or forestry officials whose basic assumptions tend to be masculinist and mainstream.

Deane Curtin (1997: 90-91) claims that women's ecological knowledge, despite its diversity across cultures and nations, tends to share certain features in common. Women's knowledge tends to be relational, located in the concrete spaces between individuals. Their knowledge also tends to be collaborative. It also tends to be bodily, integrating head and hand, and grounded in practice rather than in abstract thinking.

A fifth instance of women's empirical relationship to nature and the environment lies in the fact that the economic viability and health of women and their households are adversely affected by environmental crises, whether those crises assume the form of deforestation, the siting of hazardous waste, or pesticides sprayed on the fruits that agricultural workers harvest or children eat. Related to this and probably a consequence of it is the sixth reason that environment is a concrete gendered

concern: women are playing central roles in grassroots actions for sustainable environments all around the world.

During the 1970s, the heroic Chipko Movement of Northern India exhibited women's determination to stop the commercial tree felling that was destroying the indigenous forest and watershed upon which their lives had traditionally depended. About 27 women "threatened to hug the trees if the lumberjacks attempted to fell them" (Warren 1997b: 5). The movement of rubber tappers in Xapuri, Brazil is another example of a grassroots struggle that has organized to protect traditional subsistence strategies (both rubber tapping and collecting Brazil nuts) from "ranchers' hired hands and armed police . . . [who aim to clear] the [rainforest]" (Campbell in collaboration with The Women's Group of Xapuri 1996: 27). Women have played an important part:

> standing between the chain saws and their forest homes. . . In the rubber tappers' social movement [they] have played critical roles as union members, elected leaders, teachers, church organizers, and ritual health agents (Campbell et al. 1996: 27).

In both of these cases, women activists are:

> redefining and transforming their domestic role from one of private nurturing to one of collective, public protest [and] in this way challenging the traditional seclusion of women in the private sphere of the family (Safa 1995: 228, quoted in Campbell et al. 1996: 27).

Within the U. S. women of color are in the forefront of the environmental justice movement, because their communities are targeted as the major "repositories of the waste products of capitalist production and excessive consumption" (Taylor 1997: 39). This racialized siting of toxic waste has severe consequences for the quality of life, particularly with respect to public health. Paul Farmer (2003) posits that global capitalism's

structural violence and pathologies of power structure health risks in ways that make certain segments of the world's population more vulnerable than others. Among the most vulnerable segments are racially subordinated women and their children.

Women's leadership, especially that of women of color, often informed by traditional familial and communal values, and influenced by previous participation in civic and church-related affairs, has expanded what environmentalism means both within their communities and in the wider public sphere. Environmentalism no longer only refers to the concerns that white middle class environmentalists have conventionally defined as priorities: wildlife preservation, conservation, air quality, and forest management. Now the movement also includes struggles against the "toxic contamination of rural and urban communities" (Taylor 1997: 50), inhabited disproportionately by racially subordinated people such as Native Americans, African Americans, and Latinos.

Environmentalism also encompasses mobilizations combating hazards from pesticide spraying in agricultural fields where migrant workers labor (Taylor 1997: 51). This form of economic injustice and violence used to be considered an issue for labor activists, and environmentalists were reluctant to organize around it. Environmental justice advocates have changed that by raising important questions about the connections among environment, work, and home. They have also raised important questions concerning the environment's relationship with matters of justice and rights, and the unequal access to them that compromises racially oppressed people's health, access to occupational safety, and overall quality of life. Thanks to these activists' contributions, environmental justice is now considered both a civil right and a human right (Taylor 1997: 56; NCHRE 2000: 5).

To a great extent, this transition to human rights language and politics, both in the U. S. and elsewhere in the world, can

be attributed to strategies of local organizing that bring the concerns of local and regional struggles onto "the transnational political stage" (Naples and Desai 2002b: vii). Environmental justice activists are increasingly "using international human rights discourse and international conferences to [demand their] rights" (Naples 2002: 13). Through their participation in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and, more recently, the 2001 World Summit on Sustainable Development, which linked economic development to environmental issues, they have provided input into the drafting of the Earth Charter and/or been exposed to the principles and standards articulated in it. The Earth Charter is a visionary document completed in March 2000 after more than a decade of collaboration and consultation. The charter represents perhaps the "first global vision to recognize that humanity's environmental, economic, social, cultural, ethical, and spiritual aspirations are interconnected" (Roberts 2001: 1). It is, at once, an educational tool, a values framework, an ethical foundation, and a call to action (Earth Charter Initiative brochure). It should be no surprise that, as Jan Roberts has pointed out: "[t]he consciousness-raising process that took place during the drafting sessions held throughout the world is at least as meaningful as the actual document" (Roberts 2001: 2).

How Do Feminists Theorize Women-Nature-Economy Connections?

Now that we know that environmental degradation and the political economy of global apartheid are profoundly gendered concerns and that women are key stakeholders in the struggle to restructure human relations with nature in more sustainable and democratic ways, we might ask for more details concerning how feminist analysts make more elaborate theoretical sense of human-nature-economy connections. Is

there a feminist theory or are there competing theoretical per-spectives upon which feminist anthropologists can draw? To what extent does the everyday theorizing of the people whom anthropologists study and construct theoretical discourses about influence how anthropologists produce social analysis? The practical consciousness expressed in indigenous ecologi-cal knowledge is an important source of theory that feminist anthropologists should, perhaps, build upon, much in the way that Mary Weismantel (1995) has worked with Zumbagua theory to explicate how kinship is made within the highland Ecuadorian communities she has studied.

There are six major schools of research and activism that focus on gender and environment, and their implications for issues of subsistence and economic development:

1. The received tradition of **Environmentalism** draws on a liberal feminist perspective. This mainstream approach has begun to address "women as participants and part-ners in environmental protection and conservation pro-grams" (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 4).

2. **Ecofeminism** (Warren 1997a)is a school of thought and action that "posits a close connection between women and nature based on their shared history of oppression by patriarchal institutions [within] dominant Western culture," and based on the identification of women with nature (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 3). Some ecofeminists view this identification as natural, intrinsic to women's biological attributes, while others see that approach as essentialist and as an alternative argue that the connec-tion is only socially constructed, but something that women should embrace and foster.

3. **Feminist Environmentalism** places greater emphasis on the materiality of gendered work and responsibili-

ties, analyzing the specific resources and processes that constitute women's relationship to the environment.

4. **Socialist Feminism** (Brodkin 2000) focuses on gender's place within political economy, making use of the concepts of production and reproduction to elucidate the salience of gender.

5. **Feminist Poststructuralism** attempts to interpret the gendered experience of environment in terms of situated knowledge constructed on the basis of dimensions of difference and identity–gender, race, class, and age. This approach is informed by feminist critiques of science and development.

6. **Feminist Political Ecology**, a relatively new synthesis, draws upon concepts from the more established frameworks of feminist cultural ecology, political ecology, feminist geography, and feminist political economy (Rocheleau et al. 1996a). This approach articulates a concern for the social, political, and economic contexts that influence environmental policies and practices. There is an emphasis on the politics of decision-making and on the uneven access to, and control over, resources that is based on inequalities of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and culture. There is concern with women's struggles to sustain viable subsistence strategies and sustainable community development. Feminist political ecologists are interested also in situating local experiences within a global context of environmental and economic change.

The boundaries among these six theoretical frames are not always clear. Feminist political ecologists may draw upon certain streams of ecofeminism and socialist feminism, and there may be socialist feminists who are influenced by some feature

of feminist poststructuralism. For example, Karen Brodkin's (2000) socialist feminist theorization of intersections of race, class, and gender in global capitalism is inflected by her concern with difference, multiple identities, anti-essentialism, and contesting grand narratives. These issues are often central in poststructural analyses.

Because it appears that feminist political ecology has grown out of a critical consideration of the other schools' limitations as well as their complementary strengths, I will examine its approach in more detail, highlighting the major themes around which its research agenda has been organized: gendered knowledge, gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, and gendered environmental politics and grassroots activism.

The first theme, gendered knowledge, is grounded in women's everyday life and their struggles for survival, which entail creating, maintaining and protecting "healthy environments at home, work and in regional ecosystems"(Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 7). Women's knowledge is characterized as a "science of survival" that is informed by the integrative abilities and holistic approaches that women develop "to negotiate the complex" nexus of "household, community, and landscape" (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 7). Frequently, their science of survival comes into conflict with specialized sciences that compartmentalize these domains of knowledge as well as separate knowing from doing, and formal from informal.

The second theme is related to the differential access to and power over environmental resources (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 10). The question of rights, whether legal or customary, is raised by cases in which women's use rights are often nested within the rights of men, who may have rights to control or own natural resources as property. Beyond differentiating the various types of rights, the literature has also elucidated distinctions made between control and responsibility. Women often carry the culturally defined responsibility to transform natural re-

sources through work and to maintain and renew them without having the benefits of *de jure* control. These social inequalities are being contested.

The third theme, which addresses women's agency, is a particularly important one, because of the "recent surge in women's involvement in collective struggles over natural resource and environmental issues" (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 5). These new patterns of social action and political mobilization are "contributing to the redefinition of women's identities, the meaning of gender, and the nature of environmental problems" (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 5). As a global trend, women are in the forefront of grassroots movements. This new trend can be attributed to changes in local environmental conditions as well as to shifts in international development discourse and policy, such as the emphasis on sustainable development and participatory action. Among the local conditions propelling women to collective action are drastically declining subsistence, the state's retrenchment of the safety net, and overall a catastrophic context that forces women to "raise questions about the political system in which they operate" (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 18).

There are some commonalities in the experiences of grassroots environmental movements around the world. Most are concerned with problems of basic

> survival, the rights to live and work in healthy environment; the responsibility to protect habitats, livelihoods, and systems of life support from contamination, depletion, and destruction; and the determination to restore or rehabilitate what has already been harmed (Rocheleau et al. 1996: 6).

They are demanding more equitable and democratic forms of development, the benefits of which should be distributed fairly regardless of gender, race, or class. Women have come to voice and gained a sense of their vital "agency and empowerment," and as a consequence, the very definitions of what is

political, what is environmental, and what is just have been revised in the light of women's experiences, interests, and priorities. Traditional distinctions between public/private, productive/reproductive, and home/workplace have been problematized (Rocheleau et al. 1996b: 18).

An important aspect of the changing international climate that has fostered women's activism is the growth of the international women's movement, encouraged by the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) and the subsequent international women's conference in 1995. This significant trend has raised consciousness about women's rights as human rights and reconfigured the political landscape so that issues of gender, race, class, and culture can be addressed both at the grassroots and in supranational contexts of what Ann Kingsolver (2003) calls plurinational organizing and what others describe as transborder or transnational feminist solidarities. In this new mobilization context, community activists and organizations collaborate with advocacy organizations based in other national or international settings (Naples and Desai 2002a: 34). Some activists center their political work within transnational organizations and networks, building alliances within local communities to support efforts to improve conditions. Another important aspect of these new transborder fields of action is the political work that local and national level activists are doing through arenas such as the UN and transnational NGOs, from which they gain resources, allies, and consciousness-raising experiences that otherwise would not be available to them.

Conclusions: Reflections on the Challenges Before Us

The principles and priorities around which global restructuring is taking place raise serious questions about whether the course being taken will lead us to an outcome that is economically and ecologically sustainable, and consistent with a

vision of human rights and what philosopher John McMurtry has called the civil common, a field of democratized development where the sustainability of life rather than the conjuring power of capital accumulation is the ultimate value.

Recognizing the blurred boundaries separating them from some varieties of ecofeminists, feminist political ecologists, probably more than their sisters working within most competing schools, are equipped to examine the multifarious aspects of gender's empirical relationship to the environment. Giving analytic attention to women's knowledges, their resource tenure's rights and responsibilities, and their modes of environmental activism, feminist political ecologists acknowledge the combined environmental and economic impacts of the current moment of globalization. At this juncture, free market-centered trends are producing the uneven outcomes underscored in analyses of "global apartheid. " More so than other feminist perspectives on nature and the environment, feminist political ecology seems better equipped to interrogate the severe structural violence and pathologies of power integral to the political economy of global apartheid. As it has been characterized in this essay, global apartheid, which can be seen as the negative side of global restructuring, gives impetus to environmental degradation and the naturist injustices that engender it. The structural violence that global apartheid wields compromises human biologies and, thereby, exacerbates social suffering and undermines the overall quality of human life.

Feminist research on the multiple forms of women's agency has made it clear that globalization and neoliberalism are not monolithic or homogenizing in their power to restructure the world in the images of transnational elites and their allies. What is called globalization or transnationalism from below is clearing the space for new possibilities, including those that may potentially lead to democratic strategies for reintegrating the world. Contrary to neoliberal propaganda and its regime of

truth, there are alternatives to the global expansion of neoliberal capitalism. Moreover, globalization itself has created openings and opportunities for promoting democratic action and democratic forms of sustainable development (MacEwan 1999: 226). Even opportunities to engage in international travel, build transnational communication networks, and develop new connections and solidarities can widen the space for more promising future directions. Environmental and economic justice activists, with women increasingly in the forefront, are linking their "scattered resistance" (Naples 2002: 17) and:

> counterhegemonic struggles . . . [and in the process] develop[ing] connections between social, political, economic, and environmental issues and diverse coalitions (Naples and Desai 2002a: 41).

The anthropological and interdisciplinary studies surveyed in this overview call our attention to the urgent challenges that lie before us all. Anthropologists and other social researchers have the responsibility to elucidate the interrelated sociocultural, political-economic, and ecological contexts within which human well-being is, at best, affirmed or, at worst, undermined. With the results of these inquiries, we reach literate audiences, in many cases those assigned to read our articles and books. We educate students and elements of the public, making them more aware and, in some instances, critically conscious that something needs to be done to remake the world.

Paul Farmer advocates that more of us link our research to service and social justice by implementing "pragmatic solidarity: the rapid deployment of our tools and resources to improve the health and well-being of those who suffer [structural] . . . violence" (2003: 220). He argues that the service component of our projects "must be . . . tied tightly to demands for social . . . economic [and environmental] rights. . . " (244). Otherwise, we risk succumbing to the accommodative economy of charity in which poverty, gender oppression, and environ-

mental racism are left unchallenged, assigned to an imaginary space beyond the reach of political action and social transformation. He is adamant in his insistence that:

> [t]he divorce of research and analysis from pragmatic efforts to remediate inequalities of access is a tactical and moral error–it may be an error that constitutes, in and of itself, a human rights abuse (2003: 22).

This strong position warrants quite a bit of soul searching, something perhaps more of us need to do.

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