Abstract

This paper uses the current crisis of declining food security as a case study for the negative effects of economic globalization on the Two-Third's World; specifically women and the environment. To accomplish this, this paper uses an ecofeminist perspective to show how the capitalist patriarchal world within which we live, simultaneously devalues women and nature, rendering invisible as well as disposable. For the purpose of this paper topic, the work of Vandana Shiva is explored as her theories about the interconnectedness of women, the environment and globalization are integral to an ecofeminist analysis of globalization from below.

Capitalist Patriarchy, Women, the Environment, and a Feminist Perspective

Economic globalization perpetrates the world view of capitalist patriarchy, which has systematically devalued both women and nature. In a world ruled by capitalist patriarchy, consumption conquers needs, the market dominates the household, and the global intrudes on the local, which all inevitably deny women’s and nature’s productivity. This paper attempts to show that in order to understand the negative effects of globalization, we must begin with an analysis of its negative effects on the Two-Thirds world. An analysis of economic globalization must be accompanied by both an environmental and feminist perspective. The importance of an ecofeminist perspective is integral in showing how the capitalist patriarchal world within which we live simultaneously devalues women and nature, rendering them invisible as well as disposable.

I have chosen to look at globalization from the position of Two-Thirds world women and their struggles because it provides us with a better understanding of the continuities as well as discontinuities between the global North and South. Chandra Talpade Mohanty explains that, “this designation also highlights the fluidity and power of global forces that situate communities of people as social majorities/minorities in disparate form”\(^1\). For the purpose of this paper, I will be looking at globalization from the perspective of the Two-Thirds world women’s participation in the agricultural sector. As will be further demonstrated below,

women farmers from two-thirds world's communities are responsible for the survival of the household and in turn society as a whole.

For the purpose of this paper I have chosen to analyze the work of Vandana Shiva, and apply her theories to the interconnectedness of women, the environment and globalization. In particular, I focus on food security in India to show, not only why it should stay in the hands of women, but also how women are working to defend their rights to food, land, and all natural resources. Vandana Shiva is a physicist, philosopher of science, environmental activist and author who plays a major role in the global Ecofeminist movement as well acts as a strong critic of globalization. Shiva's work on the negative effects of globalization and the impact of capitalist patriarchy's idea of development on women in the Two-Thirds world has been extremely influential to women in the West. Shiva has been able to successfully combine an analysis of environmentalism, feminist theory and Western development policies in a passionate and accessible manner. Her ecofeminist theory is essential because it is founded on personal experience rather than solely on research. Shiva provides us an analysis of globalization from a first-hand perspective which is imperative to accurately understand the negative effects of globalization on both women and nature.

In order to understand globalization's effect on both nature and women, we must begin with a basic understanding of not only what ecofeminism is, but also what globalization is, and what its main goals are. From this position we can then develop a connection between ecofeminism and anti-globalization. The intention of this paper is not to produce ground-breaking findings about globalization, women, or the environment, but rather to articulate a holistic understanding of the negative effects of globalization on not only women and the environment, but also on people of the Two-Third's world. In order to accomplish this we must question things such as: how has the capitalist patriarchal perspective had an effect on the environment, and in turn women? How do women in agriculture challenge the dominant ideology of male as the breadwinner? How have modern science and a reductionist worldview fuelled globalization's corporate dominance over women and nature? What is the importance of food security staying in the hands of women? How does globalization describe the knowledge of women in the two-thirds world as ignorance? And, how does this affect their access to basic subsistence?

Ecofeminism and the Battle against Globalization

Ecofeminist Nature

Ecofeminism is described by Noel Sturgeon as:

...a movement that makes connections between environmentalisms and feminisms; more precisely, it articulates the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race, and class are related to the
ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment.²

There are various theories on the connections between the unequal status of women and the life-threatening destruction of our environment. However, most often the focus of ecofeminist theory has been on how to conceptualize the connection between women and nature.³ There are countless positions in which ecofeminist theory can be applied; while each can be equally as important, the argument that patriarchy equates women and nature is the focus of this paper. For, Sturgeon explains that where women are degraded, nature will be degraded, and therefore, where women are thought to be eternally giving and nurturing, nature will be thought of as endlessly fertile and exploitable.⁴

Globalization and Capitalism’s Effect on the Environment

To better understand globalization’s effect on the environment, we must first understand what globalization is in the most basic sense. Globalization is a term that has many ambiguous definitions. For the purpose of the essay, I will be using two definitions of globalization, which will intertwine. The focus of this paper will be on economic globalization; it is however difficult to define one, without the other. First, globalization refers to the shrinking of space and the vast intersecting of culture, technologies, religions, communications, which all create what is known as the “global village”.⁵ Secondly, globalization, or the global economy, is equated with external market liberalization and a reliance on the equitability of market forces.⁶

Globalization entails a shift of political and economic control from the local and national space into the global space. This goal of this political shift is to expand the scope of trade, and to move trade rapidly from the local and national levels into the global market. With this shift into global trade comes new areas such as intellectual property rights; essentially meaning that all aspects of human life can be transformed into globally traded commodities. Therefore, food, land, seeds, plants and animals are all vulnerable to the exploitation of large multinational companies whose best interest is in serving the “needs” of the global North.

Corporate Dominance over Regenerative Power: The Colonization of Seed and Woman

The emergence of modern science has lead to what is now known as a reductionist world view. This dominant system of knowledge is anything but a liberating force for humanity as a whole, but rather is a Western, male-oriented

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
definition of what knowledge is, which subjugates both nature and women simultaneously. In order to understand this subjugation, we must better understand the forced barriers between those possessing 'knowledge' as specialists, and those who are considered 'ignorant' and non-specialists. This barrier is created to effectively exclude the 'non-specialists' from the scientific domain, and to prevent the questioning of scientific methods against non-specialist knowledge.

As Shiva explains, modern science created under Western patriarchy has lead to a forced reduction of knowledge. This is because,

it has reduced the capacity of humans to know nature both by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing, and by manipulating it as inert and fragmented matter, nature’s capacity for creative regeneration and renewal was reduced.

Reductionism can then be understood as violence against both women and nature, as it subjugates them and dispossesses them of their full potential, power and productivity. From this we can understand that 'experts' and 'specialists' on a particular subject are considered to be the only legitimate producers of knowledge.

Reductionism creates a measure of value and places it onto all forms of life—be that human, plant, animal, etc.—with the aim of annihilating of all things considered to be of non-value. Reductionism creates the possibility of colonizing and controlling anything that is free and self-generative. Women's bodies, along with their connection to nature, are considered to be sites of regenerative power in the eyes of capitalist patriarchy. Therefore, women and all things found within nature—or our environment—are rendered into the category of non-value as well as non-specialist knowledge. As Shiva points out, the devaluation of contributions from women and nature go hand-in-hand with the designation of acts of colonization as development and improvement.

The Economics of the Production Boundary

Economic globalization is at fault for putting the production boundary at the level of national boundaries, and then transforming all national, as well as domestic economies, into non-economies, in the same manner that women’s work and

8 Ibid., 25.
9 Ibid., 25.
10 Ibid., 29.
11 Ibid., 33.
12 Ibid., 32.
subsistence production was earlier transformed into non-production. The international trading of food is now seen as growth, even though the food system just takes food from the local market and places it within the global ones. It can then be understood that globalization undermines both the environment and food security at both local and national levels.

The national accounting systems that are used for calculating the gross national product to determine growth are based on economic accumulation. Therefore, if a producer only consumes what they produce, they in fact do not ‘produce’ because they fail to fall into the production boundary. As Shiva explains that, “the production boundary is a political construct which excludes regenerative, renewable production cycles from the domain of production.” This then would effectively exclude a large portion of the rural poor living in the Two-Thirds world because they produce only for self-consumption.

The Conflict between Food Security and Intellectual Property Rights

Women’s Fluctuating Role within the Production Boundary

Women in the Two-Thirds world are central to the food economy as both producers and consumers. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women account for 70 to 80 percent of household food production. While in Asia, their contribution is 65 percent, compared to Latin America at 45 percent. We need to further explore women’s role as farmers because of their ability to make such large contributions despite unequal access to land, credit, and information. As Marilyn Waring explains, women have remained invisible as farmers despite their contributions. This is because people fail to see the work which women do in agricultural. Their production consistently goes unrecorded by economists as work or production because it falls outside of the “production boundary”. This issue arises not because too few women are working within agriculture, but because so many are. As is the case in most patriarchal-capitalist economies, economists have a difficult time defining women’s work inside and outside of the home; and in this instance, they fall within both categories.

Most importantly, this discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that while women are working to sustain both their families and communities, their work is not measured in wages. Furthermore, since development is measured by capital, women’s work in agriculture is then rendered as ‘non-work’. As Waring explains,

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
this invisibility can also be attributed the view of man as the primary breadwinner.\textsuperscript{20} While this patriarchal ideology still prevails and is able to continue to render women’s work invisible, an increasing number—15 to 20 percent—of rural households are now female-headed.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, approximately 35 percent of households below the poverty line are headed by women.\textsuperscript{22}

These figures are important because they challenge the perceived image not only of poor rural households as male run, but as farm work being a predominately male occupation. It is important to remember that even where there is a male earner, women’s supplementary earnings do provide a substantial contribution to the household income of poor families. And, rather, women’s incomes can actually be used as a gauge for child health and nutrition, because women tend to contribute a large share of what they earn to basic family maintenance.\textsuperscript{23} Therefore, there is a direct correlation between women’s economic wellbeing and improved health and nutrition for children.

**Poverty as Subsistence vs. Poverty as Deprivation**

We must better understand that differences between poverty as subsistence and poverty as deprivation. The conventional paradigm that development is measured under, only perceives poverty in terms of an absence of Western consumption habits, or in terms of cash incomes.\textsuperscript{24} What this development paradigm fails to consider is that poverty is also created because of Western forms and ideologies of ‘development’. It is important to separate the idea of subsistence living from poverty, because poverty is typically a result of dispossession and deprivation. Subsistence economies are capable of satisfying their basic needs through self-provision, and are therefore not poor in the sense of deprivation.\textsuperscript{25} However, they are culturally perceived as poor because they do not participate overwhelmingly in the market economy or consume commodities. It is important for us to understand that Western forms of development are what drive people who fall under the category of ‘subsistence poverty’ into ‘deprivation poverty’. This is because ‘development’ perceives natural resources as a site of exploitation, and therefore removes the primary source of these people’s livelihoods. As Shiva explains, “the scarcity of these natural resources, which form the basis of nature’s economy and especially women’s survival economy, is impoverishing women, and all marginalized peoples to an unprecedented extent”.\textsuperscript{26} Recently, much of this shift can be attributed to the rise in multinational corporations’ drive for dominance within the agricultural sector;

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\textsuperscript{20} Waring, If Women Counted.
\textsuperscript{21} Shiva, “Caliber of Destruction,” 1.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 85.
specifically in relation to intellectual property rights removing the security of natural food resources from subsistence communities, into the global market.

**The Emergence of Intellectual Property Rights**

Global corporations are no longer solely interested in owning non-renewable resources like diamonds, oil and minerals. Their interests have expanded to more problematic entities: biodiversity and water. This transformation of life into the property of corporations comes in the form of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). The aim of IPRs is to take corporate control over seeds, plants, animals and human genes, and they falsely claim to have “invented” these life forms, and then further claim patents on the knowledge associated with these organisms—knowledge which has been pirated from the Two-Thirds world. Essentially, the knowledge of many generations of women is now being claimed as an invention of Western corporations and scientists. The guiding principle of IPRs is that people do not innovate or generate knowledge unless they can derive a private profit. This principle then allows those who claim IPRs to transfer the knowledge of biodiversity from women farmers to the seed industry.

Vandana Shiva claims that globalization is another aspect of genocide, as it is a war against nature, women, children and the poor. Globalization essentially denies food to the hungry while simultaneously feeding the market. Under the Trade Related Intellectual Property (TRIPS) agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO), countries have implemented patent laws which grant exclusive, monopolistic rights to the pharmaceutical and biotech industry. This means that countries do not have the ability to ensure that the hungry are fed because this involves laws, policies, and financial commitments that are protectionist.

Thus farmers’ ownership over seeds and drugs can become problematic. If a seed is patented under the TRIPS agreement, farmers can no longer trade seeds with other farmers, because this is now illegal. TRIPS jeopardizes food security by taking the control over agriculture out of the farmer’s hands, increasing prices of food, and then shifting cropping patterns according to what seeds are made commercially available and in relation to those which will earn higher profits. TRIPS then controls which plants are cultivated on the land based on which seeds they have ownership over. This can greatly affect the livelihood of farmers who depend on a multitude of crops, rather than on a monoculture. This is problematic because if the one crop they are now harvesting fails, the family’s sole means of sustenance is lost.

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28 Shiva, “Caliber of Destruction,” 1
30 Ibid.
Two-Third’s World Women and the Continual Fight against Patriarchy

The resources and knowledge of biodiversity that have been under the control of Two-Thirds world women and their communities in order to generate sustenance for survival, are constantly being threatened by the global North. Corporations are now trying to take hold of this knowledge and claim it as their own, in order to engage it in global trade and commerce with the aim of generating a profit. Globalization’s quest for conquering natural resources has lead to phenomenal environmental degradation that can be felt all over the world. In the Two-Thirds world where women—and their families—depend on the abundance and availability of these resources in order to sustain themselves, the effects of globalization are devastating.

This destruction of natural resources, and the enforcement of monocultures, and genetically engineered food, has led women to question the safety of the food they are consuming. Women’s reliance on subsistence farming in order to feed their families, has led them to question the role of multinational corporations, and their involvement in reducing women’s ability to sustain themselves. Food security remains a central concern for women, as it is women who are taking action against the impacts of globalization on the food system—in both the North and the South. Women are leading the movement in hopes of ensuring that food is produced sustainably, in both ecologically and socially sound ways.32 Women acting for food security are consistently challenging the patriarchal paradigm, which is based on exclusion, into an inclusive paradigm where the interests of others are embraced—which includes not just humans, but all species.

It is impossible to assess the effects of globalization on women in the Two-Third’s world without exploring the historical significance of the scientific revolution, as well as generating an understanding of the ways in which globalization is connected to capitalist patriarchy. The analysis of women and their relationship to food security, provides us with an understanding of how our consumption habits in the West negatively affect the livelihoods of our international sisters in the Two-Third’s world. These issues open up several other feminist perspectives that are in need of being addressed, such as: how does globalization affect our ability for transnational feminism, or international sisterhood? How does globalization undermine food security in the global North? And how are women in the global North contributing, as well as fighting against, the injustices of globalization in both the global North and South?

Works Cited


