

Beyond Good and Evil: Notes on Global Feminist Advocacy¹

by Ewa Charkiewicz

It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of those good and respected things consists precisely in their being insidiously related, knotted, and crocheted to these evil and apparently opposed things — perhaps even in being essentially identical with them. Perhaps! But who wishes to concern him/her/self with such dangerous “Perhapses”?

Nietzsche, 1885, Beyond Good and Evil

As a global feminist-environmental advocate for the last 15 years, I engaged in lobbying for women’s rights, sustainable consumption and production, corporate accountability, Tobin tax², regulation of toxics, and the abolition of third world debt. The more I tried to be a good UN girl, the more uncomfortable I became with the effects of my engagement, which seemed to perpetuate, rather than challenge, existing power flows. Please read my concerns as a quest to contribute to the development of analysis and strategies that will allow to make sense of how power works, and to engage with global institutions on terms, which enhance the transformative potential of global NGOs.

The issues I want to problematise are perhaps best captured by a comparison of two sets of documents. In 1991, prior to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, women’s organisations gathered in Miami under the auspices of what would later become Women, Environment and Development Organisation and produced the document called Women’s Action Agenda 21. The Miami report outlined a feminist global project to do away with social and gender injustice, dirty production, wasteful consumption and military controls, and proposed a feminist vision for an alternative world order. In the outcome of the subsequent advocacy for the

Earth Summit, women were mentioned on almost every page of Agenda 21, the official conference document. The advocates gave visibility to the roles and interests of women, and offered the empowerment and participation of women in sustainable development as the solution to the problems of environment and poverty.

Following the Rio conference, women’s organisations engaged with the Commission on Sustainable Development, Rio +5 and Rio +10 (the Johannesburg Summit). The documents on women and transport, women and energy, women and water, and women and climate change pleaded for the visibility of women’s roles and interests, and again argued for the integration of women in the environmental policy frameworks.³ What we see here is the strategies developed prior to the Rio conference as applied in a different context, and with a different set of techniques for the production of knowledge. First, by the time of Johannesburg summit (2002), the sustainable development discourse has been transformed by marginalising social justice-oriented approaches and accentuating those that resonated with neo-liberal governmentality. This shift was invisible to the NGOs captured in the simulation of the implementation of Agenda 21 (more on simulated politics below).

Second, the new feminist vocabulary, which deployed the concepts of gender, gender equity, equal opportunities and individual empowerment, was stuck in a mutually productive relationship with neo-liberal governmentality. In some of the above mentioned reports, the rights-based arguments for the integration

of women were supported with cost-benefit calculations, and demonstrated the efficiencies to be gained by the integration of women. This kind of reporting which makes a business case for gender equity is highly valorised by donors and within the UN networks as the strategy to engage with UN and other international NGOs.

Third, in the time from Rio to Johannesburg the social movement, feminist movement including, have metamorphosed into NGOs, an organisational form which draws on the corporate model. The crucial elements of the NGO organisational structure are the staff, management, and the board. Funding guidelines and UN access rules disciplined social movements to make this transformation. This reorganisation led to delinking the social movement from the grassroots.

Agenda 21, adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 outlined the model and strategies for the implementation of a global social/environmental contract and participatory societies.⁴ Although the relationships between women and environments have to be carefully thought out, the political project of engendering social contracts makes sense. However, it's crucial to recognise that the project defined in Agenda 21 has never been implemented. The UN reporting process on Agenda 21, NGO alarming reports on the lack of progress in its implementation constructed Agenda 21 as if only one more push, one more wave of mobilisation, was all that was needed to make it happen.⁵ They created a presumption of implementation of Agenda 21. From the point of view of the effects of this narrative, NGOs and the UN created a simulation of "progressive" global social and environmental governance. This talk about implementing a project that did not exist has far reaching political consequences as it obscured the operations of a neo-liberal global economy as the war on livelihoods.⁶

At stake for the critical NGOs is to differentiate and make visible simulations of global liberal peace (conversations on sustainable development, human development, reforms in the Bretton Woods institutions, etc.), and the sites where global governance deploys more direct and crude controls on human bodies (and, differentially, women's bodies) and nature, such as population and development, trade and investment liberalisation, privatisation, and "anti-terrorism" discourses. My point is that we should be more careful in the engagements with the global policy discourses,

which pull us into permanent dialogues, which simulate governance, while leaving the problem of disappearing livelihoods unaddressed.

The paradigmatic example of simulation politics is the case of the Human Development Reports (HDRs) or Millenium Development Goals (MDGs), which are just talk, and do not have any institutional effects. The MDGs go back to the indicators for development assistance first announced by EU Development Assistance Committee more than a decade ago. Since then, there was ample time to invest in implementing the only and very minimal gender goal of girls education. It is very informative, that the investment had not been made, while at the same time the discourse on poverty reduction and MDGs have grown exponentially. The NGOs were pulled into taking part in this discourse, and endorsed its effects, that is the replacing of allocation of funds and the implementation of policies for poverty reduction, with a never-ending virtual talk about poverty reduction.

At stake here is how poverty or gender equality issues are studied, organised and packaged for public consumption in a calculative manner that actually enhances bio-political controls. The calculating, categorising, ranking techniques are applied to poverty, gender inequities, investment portfolio comparisons, or Poor and Moody or World Bank rankings of corporations and countries. Gender equality discourse conducted in this manner allows to communicate with the system that the feminist organisation try to change, but at the same time it contributes to reorganise the feminist and women's organisations as a stakeholder representing women reconstructed into an interest group. Engagements with calculating gender inequality contributed to remove from the agenda the issues of power.

It is not by coincidence that the title of the IMF's own history project is "Silent Revolution"⁷. That's precisely how neoliberalism was introduced, through invisible micro-techniques in the production of knowledge for the governance of markets, states, and societies. The calculative and ranking techniques are at the core of the global neo-liberal bio-politics. The regulatory controls are exercised by way of the internalisation of routines through which human subjects, entrepreneurial cities and client countries permanently adjust themselves to the requirements of making the world, its populations, nature and territories govern-

Examining Feminist and Social Movements

able in a coherent manner. At stake is the making of flexible, permanently adjustable subjects.

The pursuit of the strategy to speak the language of the system is based on the assumption that it will change global governance from within. The problem is that these strategies subtly change the movement (now identifying themselves as the NGOs). Also, for several reasons, the preoccupation with tools to make women visible and integrate them removed from the discussion a fundamental question: integrate, but into what? Equal opportunities, but in what? The remaking of sustainable development in the neo-liberal frame and neo-liberal affinities of human development were beyond the political imagination of the UN NGOs structured by the terms of participation in the UN. Defending the trees and moving from one crisis to another crisis, we did not see the loss of the forest. The fire-brigade role prompted NGOs to focus on solutions, while the causes and means for their prevention were removed from the discourses of neo-liberal governance.⁸

To avoid the concentration of examples from the feminist engagement in the Rio process, I now bring up the recent World Information Society Summit. By then, the multi-stakeholder negotiating format was already institutionalised. In the preparation for the Summit, the attempt to mobilise women was successful. The agenda for which women were mobilised was to make visible the gender divide within the global North-South IT divide. This helped the feminist movement achieve several things all at once: (1) integrate women in IT, (2) strengthen the policy discourse promoting the role of IT as the development strategy and the UN's role in global governance, and (3) strengthened the strategic role of ITs (surveillance, speed-up, and job extinction) in global restructuring by supporting the marginalisation of the debate on the origins, and social, ecological and political costs of the information society.⁹

The discussion of systemic problems is disruptive, and everybody avoids it for their own reasons. NGOs



Attended by more than 30,000 women from all around the world, the NGO Forum on Women held in Beijing in 1995 is a milestone in the women's movement

are trying to be good UN boys and girls, and are caught between two agonising trends: to resist or to conform. When tools or policy frameworks are discussed without interrogating the causes of problems, this allows for smooth maintenance of multi-stakeholder dialogues as a political technology for the permanent integration of critics with powers they oppose, and for systemic reproduction.

The 1995 women's world conference in Beijing institutionalised gender mainstreaming as the main feminist global project. At the core of gender mainstreaming is the operation of power as visibility. The tools for gender mainstreaming such as the triple gender-roles framework, the Human Development Gender indices, the Gender and Empowerment framework, the Rapid Gender Analysis reveal gender asymmetries with the use of calculative techniques, and customise women for integration in neo-liberal development policies.

Having said this, I also recognise that feminist work carried out within the conditions of possibility, have nevertheless tried to transform the gender mainstreaming projects. The imperative is to make the gender mainstreaming project a subject of self-reflection. This should focus on techniques and effects of gender mainstreaming to avoid normalising and moralising approaches (cooptation, selling out), which are not helpful in showing what went wrong and how to shift gears.

My rethinking of the visibility strategy was triggered by the question of why, with several notable exceptions, we never ask: mainstreaming into what, visibility for what? In gender and development theory¹⁰ and in the political imaginations of global feminist advocates, the current forms of action on gender exclusions, asymmetries and hierarchies have been essentialised, taken as good and effective in themselves. It follows then that what we do to redress these imbalances is good in itself. This linearity between problems and solutions, and the politics of resistance as strategic reversals require critical interrogation. The visibility of women exposed us to new forms of control and subjection.

Global Advocacy and the Realities at the UN

Majority of NGO workers come to the UN conferences as political tourists, and there is nothing wrong with being one. The problem is that the presence of

NGOs creates a simulacrum of participatory democracy. This happens in subtle non-homogenous ways.

In the name of improving the efficacy of engagement and political impact, NGOs are trained to observe UN meetings and to participate in multi-stakeholder dialogues. The trainings construct the current institutional policy format as the norm and adapt NGO bodies to the UN, World Bank or WTO governmentalities. The detailed regulations for the engagement with the UN define how UN authored documents are commented upon, who has voice, whose voices are heard, and when. The NGOs conform to these techniques or play around them. These techniques of managing the interface between sites of global governance and civil society were developed in the World Bank NGO Group (set up by the World Bank in the late 1980s), and in UNCED (Rio, 1992) to contain, "civilise" and adapt to the discontent. They have by now been normalised as the NGOs' own project.

Of particular concern is the deployment of these techniques in WTO advocacy, as if there were no problematic beginnings and no strategic differences between these institutions. The NGO caucuses are celebrated as our own success story. They are not taken to be the strategic outcome of power relations. It faded away from NGO memory that we did not invent this format of engagement where NGOs are customised as stakeholders representing the interests of different groups. The interests are determined within frameworks that are not up for negotiation. Power operates in agonising ways, giving voice without influence.

The NGO course of action is further structured by the terms of funding and rules for writing project proposals. In this respect, my favourite neo-liberal enemy is the Harvard Logical Framework,¹¹ which provides a template to write project proposals as business plans for NGO actions. In the last years, the demand and competition for funding has increased, and NGOs, the World Bank and the UN organisations compete for funding with each other. This creates a demand for a coherent framework to compare different proposals. The Harvard Logical Framework is restructuring and marketising civil society, and engages NGOs in their own subjection. Last but not least, the NGOs' investment in training themselves to participate in the UN and self-policing for good UN behaviour assure conformity with the terms of engagement. All these normalising techniques are invisible because the atten-

tion is captured by conversations about the noble causes of NGO actions: rights, equity or poverty reduction, which have mobilised and customised NGOs as a fire brigade. Given this role, NGOs operate in a responsive mode and serve a buffer in maintaining the current system of governance. In order to deal with this problem, we need to understand the seductive appeal of phrases such as poverty, gender equity, violence against women, etc. that mobilise NGOs for the neo-liberal project, which actually exacerbates poverty. As I will argue later, poverty or violence against women are discursive frames that capture politically oppositional projects. For instance, the approaches to poverty or violence on women pursued by World Bank, faced with the unequal power relations in setting the agendas and mobilising resources, prevail over the approaches of critical NGOs. Yet NGO mobilisation reinforces the mainstream discourse.

At the UN floor level, the engagement of NGOs boils down to reading the UN documents, and finding spots where paragraphs can be changed—in which parts, for instance, women should be made visible and

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included. The frameworks of the documents and the strategic approaches they adopt are not for negotiation. This makes it impossible for NGO interventions to have transformative effects on the UN documents. Despite the abundance of good intentions, the mobilisation of political energies serves an entirely different project. Crazy as the idea may sound to people convinced by its political correctness, the integration of women into the WTO regime is the effect of earnest activism to make visible the differential effects of global trade on women. Women's NGO created a discourse which made visible the role of women of international trade. The WTO took issues on board but on its own terms. An example is the first WTO seminar of gender and trade in 2003, which neatly integrated the language, giving visibility to women within the WTO regime, while the power regime was left intact.

In the same manner, the feminist discourse on violence against women enables the World Bank, for instance, to expand its system of controls to intimate spheres of our life. The argument of 'private is public' has backfired on us. The result is the enhancement of the loss of autonomy over one's own sexuality in the name of protecting it. In my recollection, the first World Bank event on women in post-socialist countries was devoted to domestic violence. The World Bank is thus not a bank that mediates loans on which it earns profits, but a regulator of the bio-politics of everyday life. At the same time, the World Bank manages global money flows on terms of the Coherence Agreement with the IMF and the WTO. The capacity to align controls over bodies with the flow of finance accounts for the World Bank's tremendous power. All mediating institutions are done away with as the World Bank zooms in on the women's bodies it seeks to protect. This way, the Bank extracts its legitimacy to manage populations and environments in the so-called developing and transition countries.

The global policy discourse on violence against women assembled around the time of the Beijing conference enhanced bio-political controls over women, and reinforced subordination by fixing women in the role of the victims. At the same time when violence against women became one of the gender and development policy frames,¹² the systemic causes of violence and ways to prevent violence were not discussed. Instead, the mainstream debate on violence shifted to morals, which lends itself to moral superiority and moral im-

perialism. Since each discourse is producing its own object by the flow of discourse and by structuring the flow with techniques to define, categorise and manage the object, the discourse on violence against women contributes to reproduce victimisation, as well as the new and old patriarchal power structures that seek “to protect” women.

It is worth remembering that feminist organisations have done a lot of work on the problems of violence before the global governmental discourse on violence against women came into being. Also, there was more emphasis given to the collective empowerment of women before individual empowerment became the neo-liberal mantra. Collective empowerment is no longer an agenda of the gender and development framework anymore.

NGO Discourses as Messianic Narratives

The problem I want to tackle here is how NGOs presume they are outside of power, and consequently see themselves as those who give immaculate birth to truth. The NGOs construct their political subjectivity on the basis of messianic narratives that represent social movements as the Redeemer coming from below, from the working class, from the grassroots, from the privileged standpoints of the excluded and the oppressed, from the local. This is the privileged subject outside of power. There is a tendency to construct the projects for alternative societies as recovery narratives, e.g., the idealised notion of virgin nature associated with Eden before the fall, which constitutes the backbone of environmental discourse.¹³ These messianic underpinnings obscure the fact that feminism and ecology as social critiques, as well as social movements, are situated in larger power/resistance landscapes. We did not come to the UN on the wings of storks or in the cabbage leaves. We are products of our societies and cultures, and global discourses.

The feminist movement has problematised the representations of women and institutions such as marriage, household, local community, state and religion, but has not problematised our political engagement with global institutions in the same manner. We are produced by processes in which we participate. The terms of NGO engagement with the UN, World Bank and WTO structure our fields of action. Our political interventions are subverted at the same time that we oppose or engage in reforming these global institutions.

NGOs operate within certain conditions of possibility, which is why I argue for the situated analysis and the cynical—or kynical—engagement with global institutions. If we don't question how we are produced, the NGOs will continue to be mobilised for neo-liberal global governance.

Among the key instruments of global governance is the division of the world into North versus South (and previously, into the three worlds). The North (actually North West) are rich and developed, the South (and post-socialist countries) are poor, victims of history and in need of rescue. The governance of environment and women in the subaltern regions is constructed precisely on these metaphors. These governing metaphors of globalisation perpetuate structural inequalities. Some of their origins are with the founding UN Declaration, which took western standards of living (and the American Dream), human rights, and western institutions as the yardsticks of development. The adoption of this framework by the UN facilitated bio-political management of populations and environments, and as Foucault put it, took away the liberties of societies in countries that were gaining independence after colonisation. The same can be said of Eastern Europe after the symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall.

The metaphors of North and South as techniques of representing the world are crucial for the formation of the global empire. The amorphous spaces, the unnamed territories, the multitudes are ungovernable. They have to be named, categorised, calculated and problematised—to be ruled.¹⁴ Power works by surveilling subjects, by naming, calculations and problematisations. It is at its strongest when it is invisible, or when it manages to make its effects invisible. Such a construction of the South as the victim of history in need of rescue actually obscures the massive transfer of wealth from the South to the North. Since the mid-1980s, the IMF has earned more from the most impoverished region in the world, South Saharan Africa, than it lends to it (Toussaint, 1998:278). According to the World Bank, 95 percent of privatised property in Poland is now owned by foreign investors.

The construction of the North as the source of norms and morals is reinforced in the global NGO and UN dialogues by the absence of North American or European voices talking about their problems. The founding assumption of development and now of neo-liberal economic globalisation—the feasibility of the

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American Dream to improve everybody's life—is not challenged. A factor that contributes to this is the division of labour between organisations focused on national and local work, and internationally oriented NGOs, which are the ones we usually meet in global arenas.

American or European NGOs appear in the framework of solidarity as those that articulate the violations of human rights or social and environmental disasters in the South or “transition” countries, and provide funding and frameworks to solve these problems. Critical investigations and personal experiences, however, debunk the myth of the rich North. If we ignore the propaganda, the U.S. is in fact a highly indebted and poor country. Consumer debt exceeds average annual household income. For 75 percent of households, the standards of living have systematically declined since the 1980s. Racism has a strong economic foundation, despite discursive commitments to multiculturalism. Wealth is concentrated, and what appears as affluence is a facade, a simulacrum, of affluence, a copy without the original. In a country such as Netherlands, after a decade of intense production of and adjustment to neo-liberal globalisation, poverty is now up to 19 percent and the crime rates are the highest in Europe. Mobbing¹⁵ reached 250,000 cases until the registration stopped when this form of violence at work was legally re-customised as gender, age or ethnic discrimination. And yet, both societies are considered the source of wealth, norms and morals. At the same time, in both countries, the problems created by the adoption of neo-liberal models of govern-

ance, shareholder value-driven capitalism, and the neo-liberalisation of social and environmental policy are blamed on the migration of jobs to developing countries (USA) or on the presence of migrants (the Netherlands). The North-versus-South metaphor works to prevent global mobilisations against the effects of global restructuring on livelihoods, which simultaneously take place in the South and in the North.

The construction of the North as rich and the South or transition countries as poor and victim of the North lends itself to the assumption that the South will be rich if it becomes like the North, thereby precluding the discussion of alternatives. This plot obscures global neo-liberal restructuring based on the bind of profits with moral imperialism, and conceals the miseries in the North as well as the role of the states in the neo-liberal restructuring of the subaltern countries. The massive redistribution of property in Poland to foreign investors and local elites, the privatisation of pension systems and re-regulation of the labour market was possible only through the work on/by the Polish government. Similar stories can be told of, for instance, South Africa or India. Pinning all the blame on corruption conveniently distracts attention from the role of governments in the neo-liberal restructuring of these countries. Because the combination of enticements, disciplines and seductions through which neo-liberal elite subjectivities are produced is not interrogated, we are stuck in the agonising combination of celebration and bewilderment when encountering feminist neo-liberals in high-level positions, from the South as well as from the North.

Alternative Voices in Feminist Discourse

In Foucault's analysis of the 1970s, the politics of resistance are about strategic reversals. Foucault himself was engaged in the movement against the death penalty and for the rights of prisoners. In his view, the pluralisations of access to policy making, such as consultations of the French government on penal policy, provide for strategic reversals from within the authoritarian systems. In his later work on neo-liberalism, Foucault identified how this political project depends on the technologies of agency and empowerment to produce responsible, fit and flexible subjects, to attune bodies to the new (post-Ford) forms of accumulation of capital. The serial customisation of social movements into NGOs, and NGOs into stakeholders, is a part of the production of the neo-liberal project. Given that

NGOs are captured inside this project, all kinds of strategies of reversal carry the risk of mobilising political energies for the perpetuation of neo-liberal governance.

Making women visible as action on the exclusion of women generates more sophisticated forms of integration of women into the technocratic patriarchal systems. The discourse on corporate social responsibility shapes political energies by structuring them as a response to itself. The discourse is strengthened even as it precludes the political debate on the causes of exploitation of people and nature, and on alternative economic policies and profit-making strategies. The strategic questions about how value is generated are left out.

Feminism and ecology as social critiques as well as social movements are situated in the larger power/resistance landscapes. One of the problems in getting out of the neo-liberal conundrum is that the resistance forces have a limited understanding of how power operates through discourse at the same time that the systems of governance they oppose are discursively organised. The result is a zone of invisibility of power. Power, which is invisible, cannot be challenged.

In addition, feminism does not have a comprehensive analysis of neoliberalism and globalisation. We have excellent work by economists, cultural studies feminists and political science feminists—but these analyses are fragmented and confined by disciplinary limits. The use of professional jargon opened the space for feminist voices within disciplines, but made feminist communication across these boundaries difficult. The same happened with activism.

In my understanding of the recent history of feminist thought, the analytical framework of the gender-sex system was meant to 'operationalise' the understanding of patriarchy, to provide the understanding of power relations through which patriarchy is institutionalised. In practice the concept of patriarchy was abandoned, and gradually, the system framework was transformed into gender mainstreaming, which turned into the technical project for integrating women into the neo-liberal globalisation.¹⁶ These transformations entailed the de-politicisation of gender discourse. By now we do not have any feminist integrative or systems approach to making sense of the world. Much work has been devoted to the analysis of gender bias in a variety of contexts, but hardly any feminist analysis of society. We either follow valuable but fragmented

narratives (e.g., women and the gendering of the labour markets, or women's rights) or connect to models created by others: socialist, Keynesian, liberal, neo-liberal global governance. Some are better for women than others, but we peg gender analysis to the models created by others like currencies pegged to the dollar.

Neo-liberal globalisation is being constructed with the technologies of agency and empowerment that integrate subjects into neo-liberalised markets and the state. Women have been integrated unequally. The ongoing social and economic restructuring increased differences among women. The challenge is to develop an analysis, which will make the increased differentiation of women visible, show how women are integrated with the neo-liberal global economy. At the same time it should provide resources to re-draw the feminist resistance subjectivities in a manner that gives justice to differences, acknowledges the local genealogies and situatedness while allowing for a common project.

There are some new things happening, new ways of thinking and being, which I associate with "young feminists." For instance, at the DAWN Training Institute, I met women activists from all over "the South" who are reframing political problems posed to them in terms of ambivalences, complexities and duplicities. This is an entirely different approach than tracing male bias and the exclusion of women, which yielded a wealth of analysis and mobilised resistance but, accepted by the system in a selective manner, lent itself to new forms of control. The young feminists are not a replacement but a successor generation, which signals a constitution of a "new" feminist subject beyond the gender mainstreaming project. We need to equip these young feminists with self-reflective tools to better prepare for new kinds of entanglements between good and evil.

This is, to some extent, captured by a new computer game called "Beyond Good & Evil."¹⁷ The action is situated on planet Hillys, where different species—humans, pigs and sharks—live together in peace. The planet is attacked by the forces of DomZ, and its inhabitants are led to believe they are defended by the Alfa Section. As the plot unfolds, the resistance organisation called IRIS discovers that DomZ and Alfa Section are in collusion with each other. The female protagonist, a photographer named Jade, is documenting the complicity of Alfa Section in the destruction of

Examining Feminist and Social Movements

Hillys. She is stylised along the mode of the empowered femininity of Lara Croft. The interesting thing is that she appears not to reproduce the Aryan beauty image.

Jade and pig partner Peyi'j (strategic partnerships are crucial to succeed in the game) are busy documenting the loss of species on Hillys. The visibility techniques in the discourse on the loss of biodiversity actually open up species and genes for bio-prospecting and enhance the operations of genomics at the same time as that dedicated ecologists struggle to calculate biodiversity in order to defend it. In the same manner, the discourse of violence on women enables stronger global bio-political controls over women, and enhances violence against or on women.

The human rights discourses mobilise the longing for security, justice and fairness in the United States. They expand the framework for discussing the civil rights of individual citizens to social, economic, environmental, women's, reproductive and sexual rights. In Western Europe, the prevailing self-deluding belief is that all human rights are already being implemented. Elsewhere, human rights come with a package of moral and legal imperialism. I wonder if it is possible at all for us to split the package up, keep the good and throw away the bad?.

While human rights are very important as tools, something problematic happened when feminist and other global NGOs accepted human rights as the universal political framework. Human rights were approached in essentialising manner, as good in themselves. As a consequence, important questions have not been asked, for instance: 1) whose rights, and into what? (2) competition for rights, so visible in the recent flawed discourse on the migration of IT jobs to India as the cause of unemployment in the USA. Human rights as the framework for political action show absence or presence of rights. Power relations that are contingent and dynamic are invisible from within the confines of this framework. At the stake to bring the inquiry into power, and the relationship between women's lives and how societies are organised back on the agenda of feminist movement. Human rights are best left as important tools for action.

The New Scary Thing Without a Name

In feminist and alter-globalist debates, neo-liberalism is analysed and politically addressed as an economic theory and economic programme. Meanwhile, an

incremental neo-liberal restructuring, which by now, with its cumulative effects, amounts to a revolution in all kinds of social and personal, economic and political, and local and global affairs have been taking place since the 1970s. Foucault's governmentality studies are illuminating because they provide a method to the study of how political technologies for the production of fit, flexible, cost-benefit-calculating subjects became essential to the restructuring of the market and the state so that bodies are aligned with new forms of capital accumulation. Many scholars, from Foucault and his work on biopolitics (inclusion of life in the mechanisms and calculations of power, which made human bodies, populations and nature the objects of surveillance and management) to Dean and Rose, Dillon, Cruiskhank, Rankin and Vavrus, made visible for us the constitutive authoritarian components of liberal governance, and how these components were accentuated by the neo-liberal revolution. Hart and Negri capture this combination by naming the new system as empire.

One of the problems with the concept of power as empire is that in the recent debates, it came to be as-

The challenge for feminism is to produce an analysis that can help us name the enemy (the new scary thing without a name), as well as to provide tools to problematise subjectivities of resistance, and to reflect on the transformations in relationships between I and Thou, and "the matrix". This is where feminist insights could provide breakthroughs—in charting the course out of the predicament and figuring out different forms of engagement with global institutions.

sociated with the United States. As a result, the current global political predicament and systemic problems are confused. Quite justifiably, civil society is mobilised as a fire brigade to oppose the military-religious turn in the U.S. government. But the neo-liberal system will carry on, albeit in a more palatable version. I think it is important to understand the relationship between neo-liberalism and what we call religious fundamentalisms, and the enhanced stress on policing and military controls. The global neo-liberal economy operates as war where human bodies and nature are treated as resources for economic growth. The new turn to patriot-type legislation and military control is essential to the sustainability of such an economy, which exacts huge social and environmental costs and does not provide populations with the means to be able to participate in the global market.

An interesting inspiration in a discussion of the contemporary state comes from the Italian political philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who investigates the power exercised by the state as combination of sovereignty (power to let live or kill life) with the biopower dedicated to the management of life. Biopower adjusts human subjects to the forms of accumulation of capital. Human subjects, as providers of labor or as consumers whose money are mobilised to purchase products are resources for the generation of profits. Others are redundant human waste. For Agamben, the paradigmatic model of this kind of society is the concentration camp, or the condition of the refugees. While the global governance discourse projects the simulation of law and order, from the perspective, of the refugees, the poor, the jobless global governance is a state of emergency, where law is suspended. The lives and livelihoods of the poor can be taken away with impunity. As the death of Rachel Corrie or the deaths in Gujarat sadly demonstrate, the list of those that can be killed with impunity extends to political and religious discontents. The economy where human bodies human bodies and nature are deployed as resources and waste dumps operates as war on life.

Economic globalisation (accelerated growth in the volume and scale of production and consumption), with its relentless pressure on human bodies and nature, neo-liberal controls and conservative political agendas based on religions and morals operate through a matrix of mutually reinforcing relationships. Feminists who talk about fundamentalisms have been right on

the target. The agenda at hand is to deepen this analysis and to problematise the recombinant relationships in the matrix.

This brings me back to the beginning—the Agenda 21 and the Rio treaties, which were negotiated at the same time as the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, which contributed to the juridical-economic restructuring of the national economies and to the establishment of the WTO in 1994. During the 1989-1992 Rio process, few NGOs made the linkages between the two processes. To put in place neo-liberal global governance required institutionalising the global as the domain of governance. The caring face of Rio (Earth Summit) and Copenhagen (Social Summit) constructed the images of the global in the political imaginary of all TV watchers: The construction of the global as the policy domain and policy object was the precondition of global governance. From the point of view of Rio, Vienna, and Copenhagen, global governance was about global liberal peace. In the political imagination of many NGOs, the framework of global liberal peace competes with neo-liberal social and economic restructuring. The question I pose is whether these are two competing frameworks, or if talk of human development and sustainable development served as a shadow concealing economic globalisation as permanent war to extract capital value (and profits) from bodies as resources. The 1992-1994 Cairo negotiations on population and development facilitated the emergence of the Vatican-led global conservative alliance. In the early 1990s, the new military doctrine of digitally organised network-centric warfare, Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), which reconfigured the security thinking in the NATO, countries to deploy electronic forms of warfare and to focus on the new enemy from within, was well under way too. The global UN conferences of the 1990s, the WTO governmental discourses and the RMA are interrelated processes. 9/11 represents a critical threshold of connectivity that clicked in place the project of global legal imperialism, or neo-liberal global governmentality, or whatever name one gives to the scary new thing.

An application of Agamben's analysis to global bio-economic and bio-political security discourses¹⁸ of global governance shows how high-tech financial capitalism operates as war on people and the environment. The system actually generates the demand for new forms of control such as patriot-type legislation to deal

with the systemic discontent with social and environmental costs of this kind of society. IT provides tools to enhance these controls in a new and capillary manner, which have never been at the disposal of the sovereign power of the state. That's why the arguments about another crisis and another cycle of capitalism out of which a new mode of regulation (a new social contract) will emerge do not seem valid.

The system for the multiplication of financial capital tries to secure its own survival by making it difficult to speak truth to power and by "invisibilising" power. In the dialectics of empire, power and resistance depend on each other. As the NGOs' engagement with the discourses of global governance shows, power holds us close to its centres, tries to close the distance to resistance, and subsumes resistance inside the power flows in order to pre-empt the lines of flight away from dominant bio-politics. At the same time it constantly entices us to speak, giving voice, though on its own terms. This is voice without influence. The inside/outside game depends on the capacities to understand this dynamics.

The challenge for feminism is to produce an analysis that can help us name the enemy (the new scary thing without a name), as well as to provide tools to problematise subjectivities of resistance, and to reflect on the transformations in relationships between I and Thou, and "the matrix". This is where feminist insights could provide breakthroughs—in charting the course out of the predicament and figuring out different forms of engagement with global institutions. This kind of self-reflective conversations will help develop tools to unravel agonising knots of good and evil, as well as give hope. We need to keep watch at the UN and other intergovernmental organisations, secure the space for strategic interventions, while steering away from the entanglement with neo-liberal controls, to make these controls visible, and to speak truth to power. Speaking truth to power is does not only imply making visible the abuse. It also implies making visible how power is organised. And this has slipped from the agendas of global feminism. Feminism as a social critique and political movement is not about technical gender frameworks, it is about women and society.

On previous attempts to open conversations on global civil governance with feminist and environmental NGOs, I have been dismissed as a troublemaker. I admit I am one. The interface of activism and academia,

feminism and ecology, and the multiple places I lived and worked provide for the kind of "disruptive" positioning that helps think out of the box. The notes are supposed to make trouble and to heal. ♪

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Footnotes

- ¹ The problems I raise in the article are not limited to feminist advocacy, and it might be interesting to have a debate on these issues with a larger group of UN NGOs. Please send comments to ewa_charkiewicz@yahoo.com .
- ² Tobin tax (named after German Nobel prize winner in economics, James Tobin) is a proposal for an incremental tax on international currency transactions. It is promoted in hope that it could generate finance for development.
- ³ These reports correspond to what was happening in academic and policy research on women and environment. By the mid-1990s, the debates shifted to identifying gender relations in environmental resource management, and investigated them in their local contexts. These important contributions to understand gender relations captured the field as they were not accompanied by the feminist analysis of environmental modernisation (the processes by which environment was "mainstreamed" into state and corporate policy). Also, feminist analysis of the effects of the production and consumption systems on women and livelihoods, and the ways they are materially and discursively organised was hardly given attention in feminist debates. In the last few years, for a number of reasons, feminism has been moving away from the environment, while in social ecology, environmentalists, with a few exceptions, have never acknowledged the importance of power and gender analysis. Regrettably, social ecofeminism, despite, or precisely because of its transformative potential, has lost voice as neo-liberal globalisation intensified.
- ⁴ It is worth keeping in mind that while Agenda 21 was negotiated as an articulation of global liberal peace, the Uruguay Round was at the same time steering governments to the project of neo-liberal globalisation. I return to this problem in the section on the scary new thing without a name.
- ⁵ The self-celebrating country reports of progress in the implementation of Agenda 21 produced by governments contributed to the construction of implementation discourse.
- ⁶ For a feminist-environmental analysis of the accumulation of capital as war on people and environment, see Theresa Brennan's *Exhausting Modernity, Ground for a New Economy, The Terrors of Globalization: Every Day Life in*

the West, 2003, both books published by Routledge.

⁷ James M. Boughton, *Silent Revolution. The International Monetary Fund 1979-1989*, IMF, 2001, <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/history/2001/index.htm>>

⁸ An example is the discourse on Millennium Development Goals (MDG), which further shifted the debate away from causes and locked the agenda on solutions, and engaged NGOs in permanent dialoguing on poverty.

⁹ It is not by chance that IT companies, including Microsoft, are big donors to the conservative presidential campaign. Patriot-type legislations boost the demand for hardware and software. Not by coincidence, the attempts by several critical think-tanks to find funding for reports on the ecological and social costs of the IT society did not meet any response from donors. Also, my attempts to put the social, ecological and political costs of information society on the agenda of a feminist IT listserve were ignored and rejected. The showcasing of successful examples of the empowerment and rescue of rural women from poverty by training them to use computers did not entail any discussion on the costs and feasibility of mainstreaming such a project. The local examples were used to simulate the existence of a general reality where rural women engaged with computers to generate income. In a similar manner MDGs (formerly known as OECD DAC development indicators) have been discussed since the early 1990s, although no progress has been made even in such basic and non-controversial issues as girls' access to education. We need to talk about poverty or rural women's access to the IT, not to solve these problems. Such talk substitutes for policy commitment.

¹⁰ Gender and development studies are focused on developing and teaching frameworks such as the triple gender roles framework by Caroline Moser, which attempts to integrate gender with human development, or the Harvard Gender Logical Framework, used to identify the roles, asymmetries, exclusions and assets to integrate women with policies and projects. The focus on technical frameworks removes from teaching, research and policy agendas the need for inquiry into, and action on, the causes of subordination of women, and any kind of system analysis of women and society. At their core is the notion of giving visibility to women. Given that bio-power operates through visibility, categorisations and calculations, the framework approach opens women up to more insidious controls, and integrates women into the global economy on neo-liberal terms. It contributes to the "McDonaldization" of teaching (one prefabricated format for all). The result of the encounter between women and institutions is that gender analysis, which was conceived as the analysis of power relations, became a technical substitute for analysing power relations. The feminist critiques of calculative projects spoke in a weak voice at the same time that gender frameworks were in demand. Because they resonated with techniques of neo-liberal

governmentality, this became the language of our conversations with the system, which eventually structured and customised global feminist advocacy in specific ways that fit with neo-liberal governmentality.

¹¹ The Harvard Logical Framework and the Harvard Gender Log Frame are the tools for writing project proposals and other NGO documents that:

- (1) deploy the cost-benefit framework and linear analysis developed in business to civil society,
- (2) structure the course of action by NGOs in specific ways by promoting certain approaches and excluding others,
- (3) provide one format for coherent donor-NGO interaction across work domains and countries,
- (4) operate as a form of power-knowledge totalising and individualising at the same time, and
- (5) ensure the alignment of resistance with technocratic rationality.

Both are taught at trainings and at academic courses as a tool for NGO management and gender mainstreaming, and some smart NGOs have learned to cheat the system, but it is impossible to escape their effects entirely.

¹² In recent years, the participation of women in politics, women and micro-credit, violence against women (particularly rape and trafficking, two themes crucial to patriarchal controls), and the role of women in post-conflict reconstruction became the leading frames of the global policy discourse on women, gender and development. They have also restructured women's NGOs via funding policies.

¹³ For an excellent explanation, see Carolyn Merchant, "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as Recovery Narrative," in William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking Human Place in Nature*, W.W. Norton, 1996.

¹⁴ In one of his interviews, Foucault said socialism failed because it did not develop alternative bio-politics.

¹⁵ Mobbing is a form of psychological violence at work when people behave in a very aggressive manner towards one person at work who differs in one way or another from his or her co-workers. See at <http://www.mobbing-usa.com/>

¹⁶ Not to rely on my experience with the World Bank only, while writing this paper, I visited several Websites (UK, Australia, Finland) which provide tools for gender mainstreaming. None of them asks for causes of gender inequalities. Instead they seek to give women visibility and a calculative form.

¹⁷ See www.beyondgoodandevil.com, and a review article at <<http://www.worthplaying.com/article.php?sid=15640>>.

¹⁸ The policy discourses on trade liberalisation and privatisation are bio-economic discourses (managing the relationships between people and resources through the focus on market governance), while sustainable development, human development, gender and development, etc. are bio-political discourses that manage the economy by focusing on populations and environment.