



**A Feminist Agenda for Transforming Structural and Technological Convergence:
A Contribution to a Global CSO Seminar on the threats from
BANG (manipulation of Bits, Atoms, Neurons and Genes) Technologies
in Montpellier, France from 22-26, November 2008**

In January 2008 a small group of feminist activists and researchers from the global North and South met in Uppsala.¹ This group emerged from several conversations among the various participants in several fora including: The *What Next?* project, the research project Women and the Politics of Place, the journal Development and transnational feminist environment justice interconnections around the World Social Forum. The participants contributed in their individual capacity but all are engaged in diverse feminist, academic and activist networks and organisations and institutions from different parts of the world. The group proposed an initial set of conceptual and policy foci as a way to open up a debate and process that engages many more feminists, environmentalists and social justice activists working on these issues.

The starting point for our discussions was to try to infuse the *What Next?* process with feminist analyses on political ecology (in relation to economic globalization, environment, new technologies and embodiment). The January discussions in Uppsala mapped out some feminist positions and thematic entry points into a whole spectrum of issues related to political ecology. In particular, the group explored current critical debates in relation to emerging research programs on bio-, geo-, and nano-technologies and their implications for social, economic, environmental, and climate justice.

With today's urgency around climate change and global warming and its devastating health and livelihood effects borne most severely by the poor in all parts of the world, and with talk now of another 'green revolution' and the shortages of clean water and food worldwide, it is critical that feminists start to take seriously alarms raised about many environmental crises and the kinds of crisis-oriented 'sustainable solutions' that are being put forward by governments and corporations alike. Feminist analyses need take into account how life science companies are appropriating and manipulating genes for seeds, food and medical purposes without public debate, oversight or consensus. The new biotech research has profound implications for farmers (and fisher people and pastoralists) and for food sovereignty worldwide impacting millions of poor women's livelihoods. Major agribusiness firms, such as Syngenta, BASF, Bayer and Monsanto are reformulating their pesticides at the nano-scale to make them more biologically active and to win new monopoly patents. It is estimated that over the next two decades, the impacts of nano-scale technology convergence on farmers and food will exceed that of farm mechanisation or of the Green Revolution. The recent spate of local protests and mobilizations swelling into a global movement for food justice is but one very visible

¹ Participants included Giovanna Di Chiro, Niclas Hällström Wendy Harcourt, Khawar Mumtaz, Anita Nayar, Dianne Rocheleau, Nidhi Tandon and Yvonne Underhill-Sem.

and rising manifestation of social, ecological and economic disjunctures at ground level, created by unfettered and unexamined technological and economic convergences among corporate and state actors at global level.

Equally, the rising sense of crisis around climate injustice, the growing economic inequities and techno-fix solutions proposed for 'adapting' to a changing climate, make it vital that researchers and activists working on political ecology, diverse economies and global gendered relations build stronger alliances. The dominant patterns of economic development based on neglect of the environment and uneven development implicate all of us. It is important to articulate an analysis that can explain the nexus among new technologies and the global economy, environment and women's rights. This type of analysis and vision is needed in order to critique and propose alternatives to: industrial monocultures including agriculture, fisheries, and forests; new seed technologies and seed sovereignty; biodiversity and conservation initiatives; agrofuels and energy technologies; carbon trading, carbon sequestration technologies and geo-engineering to solve the crisis of global climate change; genetic technologies and bio-engineering to solve the global environmental health crisis, industrial production systems driven by technological convergence at the nano-scale, and the unexamined allure of 'sustainability projects' and 'sustainable development'. What emerged from the diverse experiences of participants in the January meeting is that amidst the very fragility of the places where 'nature continues to answer back', there are possibilities for equitable and peaceful livelihoods.

A newly theorised feminist political ecology framework would pay attention to: the power dynamics between different groups of men and women at different times and places; the political processes by which power is differently articulated in different 'places' from the corporeal body to the globe; and the ways that non-human communities and landscapes co-exist with humanity in complex processes of interdependence. Such a framework will also pay attention to the different knowledges and participatory processes that must be recognized and developed to frame and guide the scientific, political and civil society agenda. This feminist critique will take into account the re-emergence of a presumed link between race and genetics, the issue of informed consent in government research protocols, the critique of genetic reductionism, the concern about the rise of a new eugenics, and the misgivings related to racial/genetic stigmatization and discrimination. Such a framework will identify the many existing, viable alternatives to neoliberalism's technologies and sciences, and it will advocate for technoscientific research and development in support of genuinely sustainable and just solutions to social and environmental problems worldwide. It would help make visible the environmentalisms of everyday life that can be seen in many community-based struggles and movements occurring around the world. We aim for nothing less than to build alternative ecologies and economies that protect the rights of people and the health of our planet.

Towards A Feminist Political Ecology Agenda²

1. Develop gendered and situated ways of applying science informed by feminist theory and ethics to transform the prevailing technoscience paradigm
 - Diversify ecological imaginaries and understandings of places;
 - Engage with diverse knowledges and practices of sustainability that build mutuality, reciprocity, and relationality;
 - Do science differently by practicing relational analyses (by incorporating multiple perspectives not through an additive process but by understanding partial objectivities and situated perspectives); and
 - Work toward negotiated outcomes (non-competitive processes and results that are produced by shaping gendered, situated understandings).

2. Challenge the rush to 'techno-fixes'
 - Challenge the mainstream and progressive left scientific communities to redress the historical and contemporary exclusions of feminist analysis;
 - Expose and interrogate dominant ecological imaginaries driving techno-fixes;
 - Map political and financial investments;
 - Create conditions for technological innovations that are democratically engendered rather than corporate driven;
 - Advocate diverse technological alternatives; and
 - Insist on feminist and democratic technology assessments using the precautionary principle and evaluate alternative options.

3. Deconstruct and consider the consequences of the apocalyptic framings of ecological catastrophes and techno-fix scenarios
 - Understand the potentially disempowering effect of doomsday scenarios;
 - Expose the responses by various manifestations of right wing fundamentalist religious groups that are positing another extreme – an ideological fix that creates an illusion of security and hope; and
 - Uncover the repressive actions by the military industrial complex including heightened surveillance, regulation and repression of human rights, especially of women, racial and sexual minorities.

4. Advance biopolitical debates on bodies and ecologies
 - Subvert male/female and nature/culture binaries;
 - Engage with transgender and disability perspectives on body enhancements, normativity, expressions of self, and human rights;
 - Explore the emergence of new subjects: women in science, in landscapes, as consumers, experimental subjects, virtual pornographic subjects, and donors of body parts; and

² Developed by Giovanna Di Chiro, Niclas Hällström Wendy Harcourt, Khawar Mumtaz, Anita Nayar, Dianne Rocheleau, Nidhi Tandon and Yvonne Underhill-Sem.

- Elaborate feminist perspectives on the proliferation of new human biotechnologies and reproductive technologies (ex. eugenics, reproductive justice, choice).
5. Apply feminist political ecology perspectives (reflecting gendered territory and resource rights, knowledges, and socio-ecological relations) to production systems and technologies such as:
- Industrial monocultures including agriculture, fisheries, and forests;
 - New seed technologies;
 - Biodiversity and conservation;
 - Agrofuels and energy technologies;
 - Carbon trading and sequestration;
 - Geo-engineering; and
 - Industrial production systems driven by technological convergence at the nano-scale.
6. Envision alternative futures
- Affirm our resistance, resilience, and rights toward imagining and creating diverse scenarios of possible futures;
 - Reframe totalizing and market driven constructs of impact, vulnerability, adaptation, and mitigation in environmental change and technology debates and revalue heterogeneous gendered knowledges and practices of sustainability;
 - Envision alternative ecologies and economies that protects the rights of people and the health of the earth;
 - Hold science accountable to do no harm (precautionary principle) and serve the common good; and
 - Restructure social and ecological relations and reclaim principles of love, compassion, reciprocity, and diverse spiritualities toward gender, racial, economic, environmental, and erotic justice.

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