

# Course Number WGST 398.3: Geographies of Gender and Ecology

## Learning Module 2: Considering Context and Community in developing Research Methods

Developed by

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### Overview

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Now that you have all got your “feet wet,” so to speak, thinking about how eco-gender studies are related to local conditions playing out in the environments represented by class members, it is time to deepen the conversation and reflect on how larger structures shape local experiences, and how those experiences connect up to what has been happening in other times and places.

From Cindi Katz's recognition that it is possible to create feminist counter-topographical maps that trace the pressures of globalizing forces as they play out in gendered ways in particular locations, to Shubhra Gururani's analysis of how preservation of natural spaces can dislocate Indigenous relationships with the land and generate new kinds of gendered vulnerabilities, to Carolein Hoogland's experience of an increasingly popular choice in the west to attempt living without money, recognition is growing that ecological debts translate to targeted embodied debts and impacts, that other worlds are possible. Even the most privileged wear the effects of global economies and ecologies in and on their/our bodies and relations.

How people spend their time; what constitutes the work that we do and value; how that work, what we eat, what we do and do not do each day affects our health; how some regions and peoples pay for their own exploitation, while others have the means to create obscuring narratives that enable beneficiaries of scattered hegemonies to avoid acknowledging complicities, ultimately in their own subordination – are all germane to our discussions this week.

*Insert Highlight #1* Salleh: p. 2: For the truth is, that a 500 year long colonization of South American land and appropriation of goods like silver, timber, or potato seed by the merchants of Europe, has left the global North far more heavily in debt to the South than vice versa.

In many ways, we have all developed particular “mattering maps,” through which we prioritize our activities and concerns, sometimes in concert with dominant forces, sometimes in resistance. Whatever matters most to us, perhaps our loved ones, perhaps our way of life, becomes a way of organizing our relationships with the prevailing conditions that are shaping the environments we inhabit. Often, we are not entirely conscious of how we advance our own narratives, by ignoring some of the inconvenient truths that shape our current moment.

Part of our objective in this class is to begin to imagine what cognitive justice might look like. How can we ensure that we are developing inclusive knowledge practices? As Catherine Odora Hoppers argues, cognitive justice recognizes that all human knowledge, including subordinated knowledges, can serve best practices and, moreover, that subalterned knowledges need to participate in global conversations, *without* coercion. Imagine that!

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## Learning Objectives

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1. Relate appropriate methodological approaches to developing ecofeminist knowledges in diverse settings
2. Examine and compare Indigenous and conservationist approaches to environmental degradation
3. Use counter-topographical mapping to identify and summarize diverse localized impacts of globalizing capital processes

## Module 2 Instructions

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1. Read the Introduction to Learning Material in this module and refer to the required readings as they are presented.
2. Read: Ecological Debt: Embodied Debt in your text book
3. Watch 'My Year of Living without Money'
4. Complete Learning Activity #1
5. Read: the *Relating appropriate methodological approaches to developing ecofeminist knowledges in diverse settings* section of the Learning Material in this module.
6. Read: *On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement*.
7. Read the *Indigenous and conservationist approaches to environmental degradation* section of the Learning Material in this module.
8. Read: Forests of Pleasure and Pain
9. Complete Learning Activity #2
10. Read the *Using counter-topographical mapping to identify and summarize diverse localized impacts of globalizing capital processes* section of the Learning Material in this module.
11. Complete Learning Activity #3
12. Read the *Conclusion* section of the Learning Material in this module.
13. Complete Learning Activity #4
14. Complete the Discussion Questions.
15. Consider completing a *Collective Journal Entry* for one of the readings or the film in this module. You will be required to complete two of these assignments by the end of the term. See the *Collective Journals* wiki page for more details.  
  
If you do NOT choose to complete a Collective Journal Entry for this Module you must develop a Counter-Topographical "map," using images or text that situates a phenomenon in your local community in the context of wider impacts that are similar in other locations. See the *Counter-Topographical Map* wiki page for more details.

## Required Readings

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- TEXT: Ecological Debt: Embodied Debt / [Ariel Salleh](#)
- Katz, Cindi. (2001). On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society*. Summer 2001, Vol. 26 Issue 4, p1213. 22p.  
<http://cyber.usask.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=4828207&site=ehost-live>
- Gururani, S. (2002). Forests of Pleasure and Pain *Gender, Place and Culture*, 9.3: 229–243. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0966369022000003842>
- YouTube: My Year of Living without Money:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhCOT8ScOu0>

## Key Terms and Concepts

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- **Embodied Debt**
- **Cognitive Justice**
- **Feminist Counter-Topographies**
- **Mattering Maps**
- **Ethics of Care**
- **One Third/Two Thirds World**

## Learning Material

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### Introduction:

This week we will begin to consider how the ways knowledge is developed relate to what it is possible to know. When, for example, we develop knowledge by reducing the number of variables considered, on some level we are de-contextualizing that knowledge. This creates a habit of mind where people can sometimes pretend that they are not responsible for the consequences arising from the kinds of knowledge they develop, or they can ignore the importance of forms of knowledge that they do not consider relevant to the question at hand, often because they have been conditioned to do so.

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Ariel Salleh: [http://cdn.fora.tv/actors/10127\\_200\\_150.jpg](http://cdn.fora.tv/actors/10127_200_150.jpg)

This is an important consideration in eco-gender studies. When we seek to develop knowledges that will support sustainabilities, it is important to get “close to the ground,” so to speak, and co-develop methodologies that respect the current conditions faced by people who participate in the research. Both Katz and Gururari, for example, attempt to work within the actual conditions faced by the groups with whom they develop research projects, and Hoogland makes an intervention in a western context that might make little to no sense in a two-thirds world environment. Salleh asks us all to consider how current economic systems are designed structurally to devalue the kinds of work and ways of knowing that are presently the most effective in off-setting the ravages of overdevelopment without cognitive or any other kind of inclusive justice.

Read: *Ecological Debt: Embodied Debt* in your text book

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Note for Blackboard page build \*\* [Embed YouTube: My Year of Living without Money: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhC0T8ScOu0>]

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Learning Activity 1: *What are your views on the choices Hoogland describes? Make a few rough notes to help you reflect on how issues in your local community might change if the economy served the people, rather than the other way around. What might constitute a first step or two in that direction?*

## **Relating appropriate methodological approaches to developing ecofeminist knowledges in diverse settings**

What are best practices for developing ecologically responsible forms of knowledge? How do feminists and social justice allies work to create inclusive forms of knowledge that help us all to enjoy more balanced lives and communities? In completing this module, you will have the opportunity to consider how contemporary feminist scholars from the fields of political ecology and feminist geography are mobilizing the tools that have been developed in their fields to question the knowledge frames and practices that have brought us to the brink of ecological challenges linking us all across diverse environments. How might one best choose to investigate what community members need to know to respond constructively to ecological challenges? What approaches are necessary to ensure that all voices are heard in agenda setting and decision making processes? What are the limits that the natural environment imposes on human activities? These questions matter, profoundly.

Insert Highlight # 2: Katz, p. 1215: What I want to offer here is a non-innocent topography of globalization and its entailments in one place as a vehicle for developing a gendered oppositional politics that moves across scale and place.

As we begin to develop our collective and individual projects in this class, we will want to practice an “ethics of care” in terms of how we approach the questions we raise. No one and nothing is served when knowledge production creates more problems than it resolves. How do we come to understand our own “mattering maps” and how these intersect with those of others who face related challenges around our beautiful planet? As part of the work for this module, you may choose to respond to our readings in the collective journal, or post your draft of a feminist counter-topographical “map” or summary of impacts, outlining the information that dominating knowledges fail to attend to, yet are producing related problems the world over. Among these are the feminization of poverty, for example, or the devaluing of caring work. How might these be related to the kinds of ecological concerns that are being raised by the authors we read for this module? Please follow the examples shared in our readings, in which writers do not try to pretend that they have a “god’s eye” view, by claiming “objectivity,” but rather attend to how their own social positioning shapes what they have to say.

Read: *On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement*.

## Indigenous and conservationist approaches to environmental degradation

Feminist and other geographers have long recognized that the spaces we inhabit are constructed by what we consider to be knowledge for operating within them. Thus, sometimes, decisions made far from the locus of impact can have profound effects on the lives of people who have not been consulted or even recognized as stakeholders in those decisions. Shubhra Gururani shares the stories of Indigenous women she works with in the Himalayas who sometimes bear tremendous physical pain in order to preserve their marginalized places in the local labour market and culture. Drawing in the insights in Gururani's article, you will be asked to consider how they translate into your local environment. You may become interested in the Chipko movement and how Gururani developed her methods for learning about the conditions she examines. How do spaces become gendered, colonized, decolonized? How can eco-gender scholars engage respectfully with cultural contexts impacted by environmental challenges?

Read: Forests of Pleasure and Pain

Learning Activity #2: Consider one gendered effect of changing ecosystems that matters to you. How would you help a high school student understand how gender relates to the ways people understand environmental challenges in your community? *Make a few notes to record your thoughts in your personal class journal. Feel free to share your ideas with the class in our collective commentary, if you like, or write up a formal journal entry for posting to our collective journal.*

## Using counter-topographical mapping to identify and summarize diverse localized impacts of globalizing capital processes

If you have not chosen to sign up as respondent to one of the articles or the film assigned for this module, you will need to develop a counter-topographical "map," using images or text, that situates a phenomenon in your local community in the context of wider impacts that are similar in other locations. What are the historical processes that have changed the landscapes/environments you inhabit, and how could those changes be presented visually or in words? Based on what you have learned, consider how it might be possible to work in greater solidarity with others who face similar conditions. Perhaps you will be inspired in this way to move toward your final project for this class, or to offer to make a proposal for our collective data gathering project. Whether you provide images or text, try to make your counter-topographical map easy to understand, again with a view to explaining the issue you wish to consider to a bright Grade 10 student, who may never have heard of the issue before. Watch the video about living without money as a way to think about what it might be possible to learn when one begins to explore avenues of working "against the grain" of the dominant systems that contour our worlds and forms of consciousness.

Learning Activity #3: *Reflect on how a counter-topographical map might reveal new information, or expose suppressed information in relation to an issue of primary concern to you in your local community, and make a few notes in your personal class journal. Feel free to share your ideas with the class in our collective commentary, if you like, or write up a formal journal entry for posting to our collective journal.*

## Conclusion:

By now you should be developing a more informed perspective on the links between intersectional gender politics and environmental issues impacting your community. Hopefully, you are moving closer to a sense of the final project you might like to complete for this class, and contributing to a lively discussion of a case study we might like to take on together.

Learning Highlight Gururani: p. 240:

. . . in the last two decades, the questions of women's empowerment, property rights, labor and violence have become central not only to feminist writings but also to mainstream discourses of planning, development and resource politics.

Learning Activity#4: *Reviewing course materials for this module, make a list of small changes that could begin to shift the ways larger economies and ecologies interact. You may use your ideas to frame a collective journal entry or discussion response.*

## Discussion Questions:

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- How do the issues raised in course materials relate to developing sound methods for documenting and changing the worst impacts of environmental neglect and destruction? How do their means of dissemination impact audience access?
- How do the issues raised by other students in the class help you to understand what cognitive justice might look like?
- What connects the course materials in this module? What are their strongest points and what questions/concerns are you left with after considering the arguments presented? What inspires you?

## Review Questions and Answers

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How did the course materials demonstrate different methodological approaches to developing new knowledges and movements?

Implicit in all of the course materials for this unit are critiques of contemporary economic practices operating through globalization, together with ways of exposing and critiquing them. As an action researcher, Hoogland tests her ideas and inspirations in community. In the case of her year of living without money, she learned that a great deal of important activity can and does go on outside of formal economic systems, and that there may be considerable value in rebalancing the value accorded to those forces. She reports being happier as a result of taking a time-out from most directly monetized activities. Both Katz and Gururani provide historical accounts of how the difficult conditions they examine have been produced as gendered, and how people's relationships to places and the roles they take up within them are changed by economic policies. All of these scholars developed and used different methods to create new knowledge about the issues they examine, which may help us to reflect on best approaches to knowledge development about the issues raised through work on the course. Clearly, Hoogland's voluntary decision to go without money for a defined period is not the same as the

forms of subsistence threatened by economic “development” outlined by Katz and Gururani, but there are also similarities worth considering.

Reflecting specifically on the articles by Gururani and Katz, what can be understood about localized and Indigenous approaches to land conservation and environmental degradation?

One of the first issues that stands out in both of these accounts reflects the ways economic decisions are made far away from the sites of most profound impact. This is a sobering fact, because it reveals, counter-topographically, that the accountabilities for such decisions do not include those most affected. Understanding such processes and practices goes a long way toward explaining how our planet came to be in the state of environmental crisis we now face. Recognizing the gendered impacts of such decisions is also vital. Often, gendered cultural practices are cruelly reinforced to deliver pain and suffering to differently gendered bodies in particular ways. However, it is possible to respond to such socio-economic contouring of consciousness by undertaking resistant choices, such as pressing for the education of girls, as occurred in Sudan.

How can developing new tools, such as counter-topographical mapping help scholars and community members identify and summarize diverse localized impacts of globalizing capital processes?

Although Katz’s method does not necessarily produce an actual map of the specific effects she documents, it does help us to imagine how to do so, in words and images. Clearly, changes in the distribution of crops and the biodiversity of the environment surrounding the village she describes could be mapped, or documented, over time. Here is where creative approaches can come in. If someone had taken a photograph, once a week in several consistent directions over the period of “development” to document the changing environment, and those were viewed in reverse, it might become possible to imagine alternative approaches. Similarly, although Hoogland’s choice to live without money was, in important ways, supported by an unjust economic system, nevertheless, she learned lessons of vital importance about the ways that capitalization impoverishes all lives, particularly in terms of our relationships with one another, and the neglect of important kinds of work in favour of those afforded monetary value in the global economy. Food for thought: If you weren’t trying to fit into the professional pathways that are currently made available through our economy, what else might you do and why might that matter?

## Glossary

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**Embodied Debt:** refers to a process by which international debt is transferred to the embodied experiences of the most disadvantaged persons in a given locale. Targeted individuals are more subject to injury and illness – without environmental safety or healthcare supports, are forced to work harder, die younger, and suffer greater indignities at the hands of those who benefit most from the contributions they make. At the same time, the low-impact lifestyles of the world’s poor are doing more to protect our planet from the excesses of the wealthy than anyone else. As Salleh argues, the wealthiest people and nations of the world owe their/our lives to the poor.

**Cognitive Justice:** When imperialist/colonialist projects exist by subordinating Indigenous, women’s, queer and other forms of knowledge, balanced perspectives and practices are lost. Not only does what is accepted as knowledge become increasingly shallow, it becomes more dangerous. Cognitive justice refers to a

practice in which all people and knowledges are included in non-coercive problem-solving. If Indigenous peoples have learned to live in cooperation with environments, that knowledge is included in revising the ways economies work.

**Mattering Maps:** In different social settings, different ideas, people, places, things matter differently. While the term was coined by Rebecca Goldstein as a way to think about how economic decisions are made, it is possible to begin with individual and community mattering maps and come to understand how these comply or diverge from dominant narratives/mattering maps.

**Feminist Counter-Topographies:** A way of mapping the under-acknowledged effects of how contemporary economic and social practices are impacting targeted individuals and communities; a first step in building solidarities toward change

**Ethics of Care:** Because caring work is devalued in patriarchal cultures, it is often devolved into the private lives of women and subordinated communities. If care is understood as a public good, then, rather than requiring the most vulnerable majority to endure and “pick up the pieces” caused by the excesses of the most defended minority, caring for one another and the world/s we live in would be recognized as a vital part of any just system.

**One Third/Two Thirds World:** It has become commonplace to refer to “third world” countries as if they are on some other planet, which they are not. The conditions of those who live in the two-thirds world are not divorced from what happens in the one third world. It is not “lucky” to be born into a dominating nation. Socio-economic systems have been constructed to favour the dominating nations.

The designation of first, second and third world countries was originally economic, and based on a model of industrial development as “progress.” First world countries were understood to be the most industrialized. Second world countries, of which Canada remains a prosperous member, rely more heavily on natural resources and agriculture than industrialization. Third world countries are those still striving to recover from the ravages of imperialisms/colonialisms. One sobering way to disrupt these violent narratives is to recognize that the dominating countries, whose leaders meet at G20 summits for example, represent global minorities who behave as if they are a majority. Many people alive on our planet now live on less than 1200 calories a day, similar to prisoners in the concentration camps of WWII. The two thirds world can then be seen as a concentrationary zone, perpetrated and exploited by the one third world. It is possible for two-thirds world conditions to exist in one-third world nations.

## References

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SPEECH OF CATHERINE ODORA HOPPERS, Professor & South African Research Chair in Development Education, UNESCO, 2008:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001636/163618e.pdf>

Virginia Held (2006). *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*. New York: Oxford UP.

George Loewenstein and Karl Moene (2006). “On Mattering Maps.” *Understanding Choice, Explaining Behaviour: Essays in Honour of Ole-Jørgen Skog*. Oslo: Unipub.  
<http://folk.uio.no/karlom/on%20mattering%20maps.pdf>

Chandra Mohanty (2003). "Under Western Eyes, Revisited." *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press.  
<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~dasgupta/Mohantysigns.pdf>

## Supplementary Resources

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George Loewenstein and Karl Moene (2006). "On Mattering Maps." *Understanding Choice, Explaining Behaviour: Essays in Honour of Ole-Jørgen Skog*. Oslo: Unipub.  
<http://folk.uio.no/karlom/on%20mattering%20maps.pdf>

Chandra Mohanty (2003). "Under Western Eyes, Revisited." *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Duke University Press.  
<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~dasgupta/Mohantysigns.pdf>

Melanie Schnell (2012). *While the Sun is Above Us*. Freehand Books. Winner of Saskatchewan First Book Award.

### Formal Assignments:

#### Collective Journal:

Sign up for and complete collective reading journal entries on Salleh, Katz, Gururani or Hoogland talk, respectively, attending to what students understand to be the methods applied to the better understand the questions/problems addressed, and how to contribute to better outcomes.

One or two, but no more than two students will comment on each item. At least one student must sign up for each reading or media selection. All students are responsible for watching the film, and completing 35 pages of reading – so the 3 articles and selections from *Silent Spring*

#### Counter-topographical mapping:

Each student who has not completed a journal response will post a counter-topographical map of the intersectionally gendered effects of the most pressing environmental issue they know of in their community and what they perceive to be its effects. How does this map help us think creatively about best methods for developing new knowledge about this problem and how to respond to it.

#### Collective Commentary:

Students are invited to share constructive feedback on collective journal entries or collective commentary, or to post materials from their consideration of discussion questions.