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Overview

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.

Learning Highlight

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.

Fig. 2-1 removed for Template Sample due to copyright.

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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Relating appropriate methodological approaches to developing ecofeminist knowledges in diverse settings

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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.

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Review Questions and Answers

Question

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

Answer

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.

Question

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

Answer

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.

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Glossary

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.