

## Women and globalization: victims, sites of resistance and new world views

*Rosemary Radford Ruether\**

My theme for this essay is "Women and Globalization." I wish to talk about women's relation to globalization both in the ways that women, especially poor women, are disproportionately victims of globalization, and also the way in which women, or women's groups, are among the important sites of critique and resistance to globalization. I also want to suggest some ways in which alternative movements and worldviews of the Sacred are emerging from this struggle.

We need to start this discussion by some definitions of what is meant by the term globalization. For me, what is being discussed today as "globalization" is simply the latest stage of Western colonialist imperialism. We need to see these current patterns of appropriation of wealth and concentration of power in the West, now especially in the hands of the elites of the United States, in this context of more than 500 years of Western colonialism.

Western colonialism can be divided into three phases. The first phase from the late fifteenth century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century ended with the independence of most of the colonies of the Americas. The second stage from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1950's saw the dividing up of Africa among the European nations, as well of most of Asia and the Middle East. England emerged as the great 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialist nation, creating the empire on which the sun never set. But the aftermath of the Second World War saw

the Dutch, French and English exhausted by the devastation of their home countries and no longer able to afford the direct occupation of these vast colonial territories.

Thus the 1950's saw a process of political decolonialism in which flag independence was conceded to many of these territories in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. A few colonial powers refused to let go, such as the Portuguese in Africa, or local white settlers tried to block African majority rule, as in Rhodesia and South Africa, and this sparked long bloody revolutionary struggles. But the general pattern that emerged from 1950's and 60's decolonialization was neo-colonialism, not popular majority rule. England and France sought to negotiate relations with their former colonies that conceded control over foreign policy and economic wealth to the white settlers and former colonial rulers. The masses of people in former colonies remained impoverished and exploited.

The United States emerged from the Second World War as the strongest world military power and quickly assumed a role of reinforcer of the neo-colonial system of control by the West. Third world liberation movements, seeking to throw off neo-colonial hegemony over their nations' foreign policy and wealth, often adopted a socialist ideology and allied with the socialist world against continuing Western domination. The West, led by the United States, made anti-Communism the ruling ideology of its foreign policy and sought to prevent any social and political systems from emerging in the Third World that would more justly distribute wealth and political power to the majority. By demonizing Communism as demonic atheistic totalitarianism, and pretending to be the champion of "democracy," the West masked the fact that what this crusade was actually all about was the maintenance of neo-colonial Western-controlled capitalism and the prevention of genuine locally-controlled political and economic democracy.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the

\* É doutora em Teologia, professora de Teologia Feminista na California Pacific School of Theology, autora de importantes obras de teologia feminista desde os anos 70, entre elas, *Sexismo e Religião*.

emergence of the United States as the overwhelming leader of global military and economic power, the third phase of colonialism built during the Cold War is now coming into greater visibility. This takes the form of a bid for U.S. imperial rule over the rest of the world, not only over the Third world, but also seeking to dominate the Middle East and to divide and marginalize the European Economic Union. Britain, ever ambivalent about submerging itself as a small island nation within the European community, seeks to attach itself to the coattails of this American empire, and thus maintain its own global reach. This I think explains the desperate loyalty of Tony Blair to American military adventures around the world.

To understand this third phase of colonialism, dubbed "globalization," one must look not only at its military expression concentrated in the hands of the U.S. military, but also at the economic institutions that have been built over the last fifty years to control the wealth of the entire planet. This effort to concentrate economic power in Western and particularly U.S. elites also demands the marginalization of the United Nations. For U.S. elites, the UN must be prevented from operating in any way as a world body that gives equal voice to the Third World or indeed to any nation other than the United States. The world system that has been built in place of the United Nations as the global extension of U.S. hegemony are what are called the Bretton Woods institutions: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and since 1995 the World Trade Organization.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund were established in 1944-47 to rebuild war-torn Europe. They are funded by contributions from member nations, with the US, with 20% of its funds, as the largest donor. The G-7 nations, the U.S. plus England, France, Germany, Italy, Canada and Japan, together monopolize the funding and control the decisions. As Europe quickly rebuilt itself, these financial institutions

turned to lending for what came to be called "development" of the Third World, actually to consolidate control over the economies of the Third World by the West. In the 1970's continued U.S. military spending, the rise of multi-national corporations and the sudden rise of oil prices by OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, caused huge funds to be built up in international banks. Under Robert McNamara's leadership (1968-81), formerly Secretary of Defense who designed such murderous projects as the electronic battlefield in the Vietnam war, the policy of the World Bank became a pushing of high volume, low interest, development loans to the Third World.

McNamara favored large development projects such as huge dams. Many of these former colonial states lacked the political and economic capacity to use such large loans for effective national developments. Many of the states were in the hands of dictatorships, such as Marcos in the Philippines, who used such funds for showy projects or stashed them in personal bank accounts. Many projects remained unfinished, with the benefits going to multinationals and national elites, not to the local people. Masses of people were displaced by projects such as dams, without ever being appropriately resettled. Little attention was paid to environmental devastation. The mounting debts accrued from such loans began to cause an international debt crisis. In 1982 Mexico announced that it could not pay its debts. International banking institutions feared a general renunciation of debts by poorer nations.

The response to this debt crisis by the international banking system was to shape the program of Structural Adjustment aimed at forcing Third World countries to pay their debts at the expense of internal development. The formula of Structural Adjustment entailed devaluation of local currency, the sharp rise in interest rates on loans, the removal of trade barriers that protected local industries and agriculture, the privatization of public sector enterprises, such as transportation,

energy, telephones and electricity, and the deregulation of goods, services and labor; that is, the removal of minimum wage laws and the state subsidies of basic foods and education and health services for the poor. Accepting this package of Structural Adjustment was mandatory in order to receive new loans to repay debts. Each country was directed to focus on one or two traditional export commodities, such as coffee, to earn money in international currency (dollars) to repay debts, at the expense of the diversification of agricultural and industrial production for local consumption.

The World Bank and IMF blamed the governments of Third World countries for their poor record in development and debt payment. The claim was that local governments were inefficient, wasting money in subsidizing local services. SA programs were billed as "austerity" measures that would cause temporary "pain" (to whom?) but would soon cause the whole economy to adjust and prosper. The reality was largely the opposite of these rosy predictions. By focusing on stepped up production of a few export products, such as coffee, the international market for such products was glutted, the prices fell and so even though the country was producing and exporting more, they were earning less on their exports.

Local wages also fell, while prices rose, especially with devaluation of currency which overnight made the same money worth a half to a tenth of what it had before. Government subsidies on food, basic commodities, health, education and transportation were all cut or eliminated, meaning that meeting all these basic needs became much more expensive, often out of the reach of the poorer classes. For example, in post-Sandinista Nicaragua free local health clinics and centers for popular adult education were closed down. Local hospitals no longer had funds to provide medicines and repair equipment. Those going to hospital often found they had to go out and buy the medicine they needed in pharmacies. Schools were privatized and became very expensive, and even state schools raised

tuition beyond the reach of an increasingly impoverished majority. The gains in literacy and health access under the revolutionary regime were rapidly lost. The result was rising poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, homelessness, especially of children, crime and the turn to drugs for money.

Pushing high interest loans to repay debts under these conditions of Structural Adjustment created a spiraling upward of the debt trap, even as the poverty of the countries supposed to repay these debts was spiraling downward. Poor countries were able to pay only 30-40% of the interest on the loans, with the rest added to the principal owed, so that even though the countries continued to squeeze their resources to pay the debts, their debts mounted year by year. Thus Structural Adjustment had the effect of creating a net extraction of wealth from poor to rich countries, or rather to international banks. For example, in 1988 \$50 billion more dollars were paid by poor countries to banks than were actually loaned to them from banks.

Structural Adjustment also had other major effects. By dismantling trade barriers, local production was devastated. Flooded by cheap products from multi-national corporations, local industries and agriculture went out of business. In Nicaragua, peanut farmers and a local peanut butter industry could not compete with Skippy's peanut butter from the US and went out of business. In Korea rice farmers were put out of business by cheap rice imports from the US and lost their land. All this was defended as simply the appropriate workings of the market laws, until one realizes that large multinationals operate under subsidies and tax breaks from their governments, while local industries in Third World countries were not similarly allowed to protect their industries and agriculture. American rice is cheap, not because American farmers are more efficient, but because these farmers and multinational rice distributors are subsidized by the U.S. government.

Why did Third World governments accept these conditions that were devastating their economies? Basically, for three reasons. Although the majority of people were suffering, the wealthy elites who also controlled the governments favored by the United States were prospering. The economists in these governments were trained in the same schools of economics as those of the World Bank and accepted these theories of market neo-liberalism as unquestioned dogma. Finally any government that resisted the SA package would be made into a pariah, isolated and denied loans and markets. This was the strategy toward Nicaragua which brought down the Sandinista government and which has been applied for more than forty years against Cuba. These strictures were enough to bring most Third World governments into line.

This system of global control by international financial institutions and corporations is being greatly extended since 1995 by the World Trade Organization. The WTO sets market rules that not only prevent any trade barriers that protect local industries, but also enforce new rules that extend the ability of such corporations to exploit local wealth, such TRIM's and TRIPs, that is, Trade-related Investment Measures, and Trade-related Intellectual Property laws. These new market rules prevent local governments from protecting their own financial institutions and property ownership against take over by foreign corporations and allow corporations to patent the genetic properties of seeds, plants and even human DNA, preventing local farmers from producing their own seeds and plants that have been part of local agriculture for thousands of years. Corporations are also buying up watersheds and aquifers, and forcing local people to pay for water that they formerly used free from their own wells and streams.

This means that Third World governments have largely lost their national sovereignty, their right or ability to pass laws to protect their own national industries or shape their own deve-

lopment and foreign policies. Through international banking institutions, global corporations, representing the interests of rich elites in dominant nations, rule the world. The gap between rich and poor has steadily grown, with some 85% of the wealth of the world in the hands of some 20% of the world's population, much of that concentrated in the top 1%, while the remaining 80% share out the remaining 15% and the poorest 20%, more than a billion people, live in deep misery on the brink of starvation.

How are women disproportionate victims of this system of global impoverishment of the majority of people? First of all, when local farming is wiped out, that sector of local farming traditionally in the hands of women is particularly devastated. In Africa much of the local farming traditionally has been done by women, but international promotion of agriculture goes entirely to male farmers with large land holdings that are able to make use of the seeds, pesticides, petroleum-based fertilizers and mechanized machinery from international agribusiness. As Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva has shown, in India women traditionally integrated the relation of animals and plants, feeding the animals from the greens left over from the harvest and using their dung for fertilizer and fuel. This sector of agriculture is devastated by the mechanized farming promoted by the Green Revolution, resulting in both further impoverishment of women and their families and also falling water tables and polluted soil and water created by petroleum-based fertilizers, pesticides and machinery. The impoverishment of women and the pollution of the earth go hand in hand.

Moreover with the devastation of traditional means of survival, it is typically women who pick up the pieces with redoubled work. If water is polluted and scarce, women walked twice as far to carry it back to their hovels on their heads. If the value of the money earned by husbands falls precipitously, women plant gardens to produce foods to sustain daily life. Women go

out to work to clean the houses of the rich; they produce food in their kitchen or create baskets and handicrafts and hawk these goods in the streets. If there is rising malnutrition in the community, women create communal kitchens to feed the poorest women and children. If the health centers are closed down, women recover traditional herbal medicine, growing it in their gardens or gathering it in forests to heal their families. It is they who nurse the sick and the dying. If there is no food or nursing staff for patients in hospitals, it is the women that arrive to feed and clean the sick family member. In short it is women's redoubled work that staves off disaster for the poorest.

Moreover women in poor families are often poorer than the adult males of their own families. If there is a little money for a car, a radio, a wristwatch, or new clothes to be had, it often is appropriated by the adult males in the family, while women go without and have to provide the means of daily subsistence for their children and even for the adult male who gives them little help. At the same time as there are redoubling the labor of daily survival, women are often suffering from the anger and loss of status of their unemployed men. It is they who are beaten in the family, raped in their homes or in the streets, as they struggle to provide means of livelihood for their children. Women typically give up food, clothes and comforts for themselves in order to provide for their children. They put themselves last, and so the women and her daughters become malnourished, while the adult males and growing sons have the privilege of the best food that is available.

Yet this very redoubled labor of women to bridge the gap of survival needs for themselves and their children also impels some women to found women's groups that become sites of resistance to the devastation wrought by globalization. Women form weaving or handicraft cooperatives that market their work through alternative market connections. As mentioned

above, women create the communal kitchens to stave off starvation for the poorest women and children. In Nicaragua the Ollas de Soya were a common feature of the poorest neighborhoods. Women got soy meal from international NGOs and mixed it with locally grown vegetables and fruits to feed those most threatened by malnutrition, typically small children and pregnant mothers. Women create health clinics with natural medicines and some donated medicines to make up for the collapse or inaccessibility of state supported health clinics.

In rural Nicaragua women created chicken-raising cooperatives. A group of women received a starter group of chicks, with the promise that as they raised them and produced more chicks, they would pass a portion on to another group of women. Their families got the benefit of some of the eggs and the occasional chicken in the stewpot. In Pakistan and elsewhere women have been the main users of micro loan schemes in which very small loans are given to women to start a small local business, with the promise that it is paid back with very small interest. This repayment is used to start more women in small business. Women become experts in the development of micro-businesses of all kinds.

International NGOs have played a vital role in these movements. These NGOs represent an entirely different kind of global relationship from the globalization of dominant corporations and financial institutions. They are themselves typically small and with modest funds, run by people who are inspired by both indignation at the dominant system and concern to help the poorest. They live simply and work directly with the local people. They provide vital connections and provisions, such as the soy beans for the Ollas de Soya, the start-up funds for the small banking schemes, the connections for alternative marketing of handicrafts, the occasional computer that allows a local group to communicate its struggle to a global network of concerned NGOs.

For example, at a recent conference of North California Call to Action, I met a Japanese-American woman friend long involved in marketing the handicrafts of Guatemalan women in such conferences where socially concerned Americans gather, getting most of the profit directly back to the local people. She gave me a Guatemalan bag, with a tag advertising the women's group that produced it. This group calls themselves UPAVIM, Unidas para vivir mejor, United for a Better Life. The tag described the group in the following way: "This product was made by women who live on the outskirts of Guatemala City in an impoverished area called Esperanza (Hope)." This happens to be a community I have visited several times. It was started by refugees uprooted by the Guatemalan military from their villages who settled in what was originally a garbage dump outside the city. The tag goes on to describe the work of this group. "By working together these women have developed a community medical clinic, a dental clinic, a scholarship and tutoring program, an infant growth monitoring and breast-feeding promotion program, a day care center with Montessori trained teachers, and a craft project that generates income for the individual women and for these community programs. Moreover they have maintained a spirit of Hope which many in similar circumstances have lost long ago. By purchasing this product you support the entire community."

Some might find this spectacle of women's redoubled efforts ambivalent. In effect women's redoubled volunteer labor staves off total devastation for their families and communities and allows the evils of the dominant system that is impoverishing them to not appear as bad as it is. Thanks to women, many of the poorest do not actually starve; they manage to survive in what appears hopeless situations. Yet these women are not only bridging the gaps of desperate poverty by their added work, they are also gaining a political education by their organizing. They are

beginning to name the institutions that are impoverishing them, the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO. They are making connections with the alternative networks that not only help them survive, but also put them in touch with a global community that is generating an alternative vision of development.

With the help of such alliances leaders of such local women's cooperatives show up at global meetings, such as the NGO gathering at the women's conference in Beijing, China in 1995: Here leaders of women's alternative movements from every country in the world showed up. There they quickly gravitated to workshops with other women of similar interests. Women interested in microbanking plans from every country gathered together to exchange ideas and information. Similarly women interested in health clinics, in reproductive rights, in agricultural coops, in popular education, in alternative theatre and many other projects networked with each other. The NGO conference at Beijing was literally festival of networking of women's alternative organizing. The women carried back to their own countries and local communities, not only fresh ideas and information, but a whole set of contracts around the world on which they could draw for ongoing support. When their own governments, in cahoots with some large corporation or financial institution, sought to close them down, they could now communicate with a network of friends around the world who would help raise the alarm and bring pressure on the oppressing institutions to back off.

Women's alternative organizations for survival have thus become major players in the movements of resistance to the Bretton Woods institutions and the alternative visions of more just, democratic and ecologically sustainable forms of development. These movements of resistance and alternative forms of development have found their voice in the International Forum on Globalization and their parliament in the World Social Forum that has met for the last several years at Porto Alegre, Brazil. Here

women's groups join with many other movements of resistance, indigenous movements, workers' unions, student groups, landless peasant movements, needless to say many of these also largely dependent on women's organizing efforts. Major spokespersons, such as Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, and economists Walden Bello and David Korten are shaping both a concerted critique of the dominant economic order, and also envisioning an alternative way of development. They have found their political spokesperson in Brazilian President Luiz Ignacio Lulu da Silva, and their slogan is "another world is possible."

This vision of an alternative way of development demands a major turn around to corporation-led globalization. Instead of more and more control over wealth by a small elite in distant centers of power, it calls for a redistribution of power and control over decision-making to the local level. Instead of disempowering local government, it calls for a reempowering of a local government much more democratically elected, reflecting local interests. Instead of stripping local people of protection for their agriculture and industry, it calls for local government to protect the national economy from being overrun by large corporations.

There are also movements for the recovery of traditional methods of farming that rebuild soils and prevent soil erosion and air and water pollution and an education in such methods for current farmers. There is organized resistance to trade rules that seek to deprive local farmers of their traditional knowledge, and a concerted counter movement that calls for the shutting down the Bretton Woods institutions, in favor of international bodies built through NGO that represent this alternative vision. In short a movement for a world alternative to top down globalization is emerging with great pain, but also renewed hope.

What does religion have to do with these movements for women and alternatives to globalization. There are many connections.

Religious organizations are major sponsors of such alternative movements. Also religious faith, inspired particularly by recent developments of liberation, and ecofeminist theologies, and spiritualities are an important motivators for people making commitments to such projects. This involvement of religious communities in social justice and ecological struggles is becoming increasingly interfaith. The movement for engaged Buddhist in Thailand, for example, sponsored a world conference two years ago in Bangkok with the theme "alternatives to consumerism." It drew leaders of anti-globalization movements from all over Asia, as well as Europe and the United States. Hindus, Christians, Jews and people from Indigenous religions shared their spiritual motivations for such involvement, with the perspective of engaged Buddhist providing the overarching spirituality of the conference.

What one sees in such global gatherings is a great deal of convergence toward a common perspective on ecological spirituality, whether it be the work of Sulak Shivaraska' engaged Buddhism, Vandana Shiva reclaiming Shakti as the female power of the universe from a Hindu tradition, Ivone Gebara reimagining the Christian Trinity from a Latin American ecofeminist perspective or Selene Fox of the Circle Sanctuary in Mt Horeb, Wisconsin defining her vision as a pagan.

There is no one source for this emerging commonality. Rather its roots lie in the processes by which those of us who are critical of the dominant global system are responding to similar challenges and coming up with similar alternative world views in the context of a 21<sup>st</sup> century world threatened by military violence, economic exploitation and ecological collapse.

There is also a shared recognition across many religious and cultural traditions that a male hierarchical concept of the divine and the universe has functioned across the millennia as a major reinforcement of these patterns of social domination. This recognition is creating a concept of the divine, and of humanity and the

earth in relation to the divine that, if not exactly alike, have a great deal of communality. One can perhaps speak of an ecumenical and inter-religious common ground for an ecofeminist theology and spirituality.

This common ecofeminist theology or worldview shared some of the following. There is a rejecting of a splitting of the divine from the earth, as personified immortal entities located in some super-celestial realm outside the universe as ruler over it. The concept of God is deconstructed. The divine is instead seen as the matrix of life-giving energy that is in, through and under all things, sustaining and renewing life. Or to use the language of Paul in the Book of Acts, "the One in whom we live, and move and have our being."

This is not pantheism in the sense of the reduction of life-giving energy to what "is," for what "is" includes the great superstructures of dominating power, the Pentagon, the World Trade Organization, etc. Rather we need to think of this life-giving matrix as pan-en-theist, or transcendently immanent. That is to say, it not only sustains the renewal of the natural cycles of life, but also empowers us to struggle against the hierarchies of dominance and to create new relations of mutuality.

This divine energy for life and renewal of life is neither male nor female nor anthropomorphic in any literal sense, although it can be imaged in many ways, not in ways that reinforce gender stereotypes and relations of dominance, but in ways that celebrate our diverse bodies and energies. I like to think this as "divine Wisdom," as the font of life that wells up to create and recreate anew all living things in ecozoic community. The Holy One calls us to repent of the power of domination that violates and impoverishes 'the other,' and to cultivate relationships of mutual empowerment and mutual flourishing. This is a vision of the Holy that calls us into life giving community from many strands of tradition, culture and history. It is also

a vision that calls us to stand shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm against the system of economic, military and ecological violence that is threatening the very fabric of planetary life. This, as Thomas Berry has said, is the "great work" of our generation.

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