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Women, Land-Struggles and The Valorization of Labor

How can we ever get out of poverty if we can't get a piece of land to work? If we had land to plant, we wouldn't need to get food sent to us all the way from the United States. No. We'd have our own. But as long as the government refuses to give us the land and other resources we need, we'll continue to have foreigners running our country.

—Elvia Alvarado (Benjamin 1987:104)

Introduction: Women Keep the World Alive

Until not long ago, issues relating to land and land struggles would have failed to generate much interest among North Americans, unless they were farmers or descendants of the American Indians for whom the importance of land as the foundation of life is still paramount, culturally at least. For the rest of the population, the land question seemed to have receded into a distant past, as in the aftermath of a prolonged urbanization and industrialization process, land no longer appeared as the fundamental means of reproduction, and new technologies claimed to provide the power, self-reliance, and creativity that people once associated with agriculture.

This has been a great loss because this amnesia has led to a world where the basic questions concerning our existence—where our food comes from, whether it nourishes or poisons our bodies—remain unanswered and are often unasked. This indifference to land among urban dwellers is coming to an end, however. Concern for the genetic engineering of agricultural crops and the ecological impact of the destruction of the tropical forests, together with the struggles of indigenous people, like the Zapatistas who have risen up in arms to oppose land privatization, have created a new awareness about the importance of the “land question,” not long ago still identified as a “Third World” issue.

There has also been a conceptual shift, in the last twenty years, concerning our understanding of the relation between land and capitalism. This shift has been promoted by the work of activist-scholars like Maria Mies (1986, 1999), Vandana Shiva (1989,1993); Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999, 2001); Claudia von Werlhof (2001), who have shown that land is the material basis for women's subsistence work, and the main source of "food security" for millions of people across the planet. Maria Mies also views this subsistence work as the paradigm of a new social perspective, providing a realistic alternative to capitalist globalization.

It is against this political and conceptual background that I examine the struggles that women are making worldwide to gain access to land, boost subsistence farming, and counter the expanding commercialization of natural resources. I argue that these efforts are extremely important. Thanks to them, billions of people are able to survive, and they point in the direction of the changes we have to make if we are to regain control over the means of *production*, and construct a society where our reproduction does not threaten the survival of other people, nor threatens the continuation of life on the planet.

Women and Land: A Historical Perspective

It is an indisputable fact, though one difficult to measure, that women are the subsistence farmers of the planet. That is, women are responsible for and produce the bulk of the food that is consumed by their families (immediate or extended) or that is sold at the local markets for consumption. This is especially true in Africa, even though across the continent women's right to own land is often denied, and women's access to land, in some countries, is possible only through the intervention and mediation of male kins (Wanyeki 2003).¹

Subsistence farming is difficult to measure because it is unwaged work; thus its status is similar to that of housework. Even the women who are subsistence farmers often do not consider it as work and, despite attempts to measure its significance in quantitative terms, we do not have reliable estimates concerning the number of hours or number of workers involved, and the value of their work.

International agencies like FAO (Food and Agriculture Association), the ILO (International Labor Organization), and the United Nations have generally overlooked the difficulties posed by the measurement of subsistence work. But they have recognized that much depends on the definition we use. Thus they have noted that:

In Bangladesh, [the] labour force participation of women was 10 percent according to the Labour Force Survey of 1985/86. But when, in 1989, the Labour Force Survey included in the questionnaire specific activities such as threshing, food-processing and poultry-rearing the economic activity rate went up to 63 percent (UN 1995:114).²

It is not easy, then, on the basis of the few statistics available, to assess how many people, and in particular how many women are involved in subsistence farming; but clearly it is a substantial number. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, according to FAO (2002), “women produce up to 80 percent of all the basic foodstuffs for household consumption and for sale.” Given that the population of sub-Saharan Africa is about three-quarters of a billion people, with a large percentage of children, this means that more than a hundred million African women must be subsistence farmers.³ Indeed, women hold up *more* than half the sky!

We should also recognize that the persistence of subsistence farming is an astounding phenomenon considering that capitalist development has been premised on the separation of agricultural producers, women above all, from the land. This reality can only be explained on the basis of a tremendous struggle women have made to resist the commercialization of agriculture.

Evidence for this struggle is found throughout the history of colonization, from the Andes to Africa. In response to land expropriation by the Spaniards (assisted by local chiefs), women in Mexico and Peru, in the 16th and 17th centuries, ran to the mountains, rallied the population to resist the foreign invaders, and became the staunchest defenders of the old cultures and religions, which were centered on the worship of nature-gods (Silverblatt 1987; Federici 2004) Later, in the nineteenth century, in Africa and Asia, women defended the traditional female farming systems against the systematic attempts made by the European colonialists to dismantle them and redefine agricultural work as a male job.

As Ester Boserup (among others) has shown, with reference to West Africa, not only did colonial officers, missionaries and, later, agricultural developers impose commercial crops at the expense of food production; though African women did most of the farming; they excluded women from the study of modern farming systems and denied them technical assistance. They also privileged men with regard to land assignment, even when the men were absent from their homes (Boserup 1970:53-55, 59-60). Thus, in addition to eroding women’s “traditional” rights, as participants in communal land-systems and independent cultivators, the colonialists and developers alike introduced new divisions between women and men. They imposed a new sexual

division of labor, based upon women's subordination to men and their confinement to unpaid household labor, which, in the colonialists' schemes, included unpaid cooperation with their husbands in the cultivation of cash-crops.

Women, however, did not accept this deterioration in their social position without protest. In colonial Africa, whenever they feared that the government might sell their land or might appropriate their crops, they revolted. Exemplary is the protest that women mounted against the colonial authorities in Kedjom Keku and Kedjom Ketinguh, in Northwestern (then British) Cameroon, in 1958. Angered by rumors claiming that the government was going to put their land up for sale, 7,000 women repeatedly marched to Bamenda, the provincial capital at the time, and, in their longest stay, camped for two weeks outside the British colonial administrative buildings, "singing loudly and making their rumbustious presence felt" (Diduk 1989:339-340).

In the same region, women fought against the destruction of their subsistence farms by foraging cattle owned by either members of the local male elite or the nomadic Fulani to whom the colonial authorities had granted seasonal pasturage rights expecting to collect a herd tax. In this case too, the women's boisterous protest defeated the plan, forcing the authorities to sanction the offending pastoralists. As Susan Diduk writes,

In the protests women perceived themselves as fighting for the survival and subsistence needs of family and kin. Their agricultural labour was and continues to be indispensable to daily food production. Kedjom men also emphasise the importance of these roles in the past and present. Today they are frequently heard to say, "Don't women suffer for farming and for carrying children for nine months? Yes, they do good for the country." (Diduk 1989:343)⁴

There were many similar struggles, in the 1940s and 1950s, throughout Africa, by women resisting the introduction of cash crops, to which the most fertile lands were being allocated, and the extra work it imposed on them, which took them away from their subsistence farming.

How productive women's subsistence farming continued to be, from the viewpoint of the survival of the colonized communities, can be seen from the contribution it made to the anti-colonial struggle and specifically to the maintenance of liberation fighters in the bush (e.g., in Algeria, Kenya, and Mozambique) (Davidson 1981:76-78, 96-8, 170). Similarly, in the post-independence period, women fought against being recruited in agricultural development projects as unpaid "helpers" of their husbands.

The best example of this resistance is the intense struggle women made in the Senegambia to refuse to cooperate in the commercial cultivation of rice crops, which came at the expense of their subsistence food production (Carney and Watts 1991).

It is because of these struggles—which are now recognized as the main reason for the failure of agricultural development projects through the 1960s and 1970s (Moser 1993)—that women continue to be the world’s main subsistence farmers; and a sizable subsistence sector has survived in many regions of the world, despite the commitment of pre- and post-independence governments to promote “economic development” along capitalist lines. The determination of millions of women in Africa, Asia, and the Americas to not abandon subsistence farming must be emphasized to counter the tendency, present even among radical social scientists, to interpret the survival of subsistence work only as a consequence of international capital’s need to cheapen the cost of the reproduction of labor and “liberate” male workers for the cultivation of cash crops and other form of waged labor.

Claude Meillassoux (1981), the main Marxist proponent of this theory, has argued that female subsistence-oriented production, or the “domestic economy,” as he calls it, has ensured a supply of cheap workers for the capitalist sector at home and abroad and, as such, it has subsidized capitalist accumulation. As his argument goes, thanks to the work of the “village,” the laborers who migrated to Paris or Johannesburg have provided a “free” commodity to the capitalist who hired them; since the employers did not have to pay for their upbringing nor had to continue to support them with unemployment benefits when their work was no longer needed.

From this perspective, women’s labor in subsistence farming would be a bonus for governments, companies, and development agencies, enabling them to more effectively exploit waged workers and transfer wealth from the rural to the urban areas, in effect degrading the quality of the lives of female farmers and their communities (Meillassoux 1981:110-111). To his credit, Meillassoux acknowledges the efforts made by international agencies and governments to “underdevelop” the subsistence sector. He sees the constant draining of its resources, and recognizes the precarious nature of this system of labor-reproduction, anticipating that it may soon undergo a decisive crisis.⁵ But overall, he too has failed to recognize the struggle underpinning the survival of subsistence work and its continuing importance—despite the attacks waged upon it—from the viewpoint of the community’s capacity to resist the encroachment of capitalist relations.

As for liberal economists—their view of “subsistence work” degrades it to the level of an “uneconomic,” “unproductive” activity (in the same way as liberal economics refuses to see women’s unpaid domestic labor in the home as work). As an alternative, liberal economists propose “income generating projects,” the universal remedy to poverty in the neo-liberal agenda,⁶ and presumably the key to women’s emancipation.

What these different perspectives ignore is the strategic importance that access to land and food production has had for women and their communities, despite the ability of companies and governments to use it at times for their own ends. An analogy can be made with the situation that developed during slavery in Jamaica, where the plantation owners gave the slaves small plots of land (“provision grounds”) to cultivate for their own support. The owners took this measure to save on food imports and reduce the cost of reproducing their workers. But the slaves were able to take advantage of it, as it gave them more mobility and independence such that—according to some historians—even before emancipation, a proto-peasantry had formed in the island, possessing a remarkable freedom of movement, and already deriving some income from the sale of its own products (Bush 1990; Morrissey 1989).⁷

Extending this analogy to illustrate the post-colonial capitalist use of subsistence labor we can say that subsistence agriculture has been an important means of support for billions of workers, giving wage laborers the possibility to contract better conditions of work and survive labor strikes and political protests, so that in several countries the wage sector has acquired an importance disproportionate to its small numerical size (Federici 1992).⁸

The “village”—a metaphor for subsistence farming in a communal setting—has been a crucial site also for women’s struggle, providing a base from which to reclaim the wealth the state and capital were removing from it. It is a struggle that has taken many forms, often being directed as much against men as against government, but always strengthened by the fact that women had access to land and could also support themselves and their children directly through the production of food and through the sale of their surplus product. Even after becoming urbanized, women have continued to cultivate any patch of land they could gain access to in order to feed their families and maintain a certain degree of autonomy from the market (Bryceson 1993:105-117).

To what extent the village has been a source of power for female and male workers across the former colonial world can be measured by the attack that from the early 1980s through the 1990s the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and

the World Trade Organization (WTO) have waged against it under the guise of Structural Adjustment and “globalization.”⁹

The World Bank has made the destruction of subsistence agriculture and the commercialization of land the centerpiece of its ubiquitous structural adjustment programs (Federici 1992; Caffentzis 1995; Faraclas 2001; Turner and Brownhill 2001). As a consequence, large tracts of communal land have been taken over by agribusiness and devoted to export crops, while “cheap” (i.e. subsidized) imported foods, from Europe and North America, have flooded the liberalized economies of Africa and Asia (which are forbidden to subsidize their farmers), further displacing women farmers from the local markets. War has completed the task, terrorizing millions into flight from their homelands (Federici 2000).

What has followed has been a *reproduction crisis* of proportions not seen even in the colonial period. Even in regions famous for their agricultural productivity, like southern Nigeria, food is now scarce or too expensive to be within reach of the average person who, after the implementation of structural adjustment programs, has to contend simultaneously with price hikes, frozen wages, devalued currency, widespread unemployment, and cuts in social services.¹⁰

This is where the importance of women’s struggles for land stands out. Women have been the main buffer for the world proletariat against starvation imposed by the World Bank’s neo-liberal regime. They have been the main opponents of the neo-liberal demand that “market prices” determine who should live and who should die, and they are the ones who have provided a practical model for the reproduction of life in a non-capitalist way.

Struggles for Subsistence and Against “Globalization” in Africa, Asia and the Americas

Faced with a renewed drive toward land privatization, the extension of cash crops, and the rise in food prices due to economic adjustment and globalization, women have resorted to many strategies to continue to support their families, pitting them against the most powerful institutions on the planet.

One of the primary strategies women have adopted to defend their communities from the impact of economic adjustment and dependence on the global market has been the expansion of subsistence farming also in the urban centers.

Exemplary is the case of Guinea Bissau studied by Galli and Funk (1995) which shows that, since the early 1980s, women have planted small gardens with vegetables, cassava, and fruit trees around most houses in the capital city of Bissau and other towns; and in time of scarcity they have preferred to forfeit the earnings they might have made selling their produce to ensure their families would not go without food.¹¹ Still with reference to Africa, this picture is confirmed by Christa Wichterich who describes women subsistence farming and urban gardening as “cooking pot economics.” She too notes that in the 1990s, it was revived in many Africa’s cities; the urban farmers being mostly women from the lower class:

There were onions and papaya trees, instead of flower-borders, in front of the housing estates of underpaid civil servants in Dar-es-Salaam; chickens and banana plants in the backyards of Lusaka; vegetables on the wide central reservations of the arterial roads of Kampala, and especially of Kinshasa, where the food supply system had largely collapsed... In [Kenyan] towns [too]...green roadside strips, front gardens and wasteland sites were immediately occupied with maize, plants, *sukum wiki*, the most popular type of cabbage. (Wichterich 2000:73)

However, in order to expand food production women have had to battle to expand their access to land, which the international agencies’ drives to privatize land and commercialize agriculture have further jeopardized.

This may be the reason why, in the case of Guinea Bissau, many women have chosen to remain in the rural area, while most of the men have migrated, with the result that there has been a “feminization of the rural areas, many villages now consisting of women farming alone or in women’s coops” (Galli and Funk 1995:23).

Regaining or expanding land for subsistence farming has been one of the main battles also for rural women in Bangladesh, leading to the formation of the Landless Women Association that has been carrying on land occupations since 1992. During this period, the Association has managed to settle 50,000 families, often confronting landowners in pitched confrontations. According to Shamsun Nahar Khan Doli, a leader of the Association to whom I owe this report, many occupations are on “chars,” low-lying islands formed by soil deposits in the middle of a river.¹² Such new lands should be allocated to landless farmers, according to Bangladeshi law, but because of the growing commercial value of land, big landowners have increasingly seized them. Women are now organizing to stop them, defending themselves with brooms, spears of bamboo, and even knives. Women have also set up alarm systems, to gather other

women when boats with the landowners or their goons approach, and push the attackers off or stop them from landing.

Similar land struggles are being fought in South America. In Paraguay, for example, the Peasant Women's Commission (CMC) was formed in 1985 in alliance with the Paraguayan Peasant's Movement (MCP) to demand land distribution (Fisher 1993:86). As Jo Fischer points out, the CMC was the first peasant women's movement that went into the streets in support of its demands, and incorporated in its program women's concerns, also condemning "their double oppression, both as peasants and as women" (Fisher 1993:87).

The turning point for the CMC came when the government granted large tracts of land to the peasant movement in the forests close to the Brazilian border. The women took these grants as an opportunity to organize a model community joining together to collectively farm their strips of land. As Geraldina, an early founder of CMC pointed out,

We work all the time, more now than ever before, but we've also changed the way we work. We're experimenting with communal work to see if it gives us more time for other things. It also gives us a chance to share our experiences and worries. This is a very different way of living for us. Before, we didn't even know our neighbors. (Fisher 1993:98).

Women's land struggles have included the defense of communities threatened by commercial housing projects constructed in the name of "urban development." "Housing" has often involved the loss of "land" for food production historically. An example is the struggle of women in the Kawaala neighborhood of Kampala (Uganda) where the World Bank, in conjunction with the Kampala City Council (KCC), in 1992-1993, sponsored a large housing project that would destroy much subsistence farm land around or near people's homes. Not surprisingly, it was women who most strenuously organized against it, through the formation of an Abataka (Residents) Committee, eventually forcing the Bank to withdraw from the project. According to one of the women leaders:

While men were shying away, women were able to say anything in public meetings in front of government officials. Women were more vocal because they were directly affected. It is very hard for women to stand without any means of income....most of these women are people who basically support their children and without any income and food they cannot do it...You come and take their peace and income and they are going to fight, not because

they want to, but because they have been oppressed and suppressed. (Tripp 2000:183)

Aili Mari Tripp points out that the situation in the Kawaala neighborhood is far from unique.¹³ Similar struggles have been reported from different parts of Africa and Asia, where peasant women's organizations have opposed the development of industrial zones threatening to displace them and their families and contaminate the environment.

Industrial or commercial housing development often clashes, today, with women's subsistence farming, in a context in which more and more women even in urban centers are gardening (in Kampala women grow 45 percent of the food for their families). It is important to add that in defending land from assault by commercial interests and affirming the principle that "land and life are not for sale," women again, as in the past against colonial invasion, are defending their peoples' history and their culture. In the case of Kawaala, the majority of residents on the disputed land had been living there for generations and had buried their kin there—for many in Uganda the ultimate evidence of land ownership. Tripp's reflections on this land struggle are pertinent to my thesis:

Stepping back from the events of the conflict, it becomes evident that the residents, especially the women involved, were trying to institutionalize some new norms for community mobilization, not just in Kawaala but more widely in providing a model for other community projects. They had a vision of a more collaborative effort that took the needs of women, widows, children, and the elderly as a starting point and recognized their dependence on the land for survival. (Tripp 2000:194)

Two more developments need to be mentioned in conjunction with women's defense of subsistence production. First, there has been the formation of regional systems of self-sufficiency aiming to guarantee "food security" and maintain an economy based on solidarity and the refusal of competition. The most impressive example in this respect comes from India where women formed the National Alliance for Women's Food Rights, a national movement made of thirty-five women's groups. One of the main efforts of the Alliance has been the campaign in defense of the mustard seed economy that is crucial for many rural and urban women in India. A subsistence crop, the seed has been threatened by the attempts of multinational corporations based in the United States to impose genetically-engineered soybeans as a source of cooking oil.¹⁴ In response, the Alliance has built "direct producer-consumer alliances" to "defend the livelihood of farmers and the diverse cultural choices of

consumers,” as stated by Vandana Shiva (2000), one of the leaders of the movement. In her words: “We protest soybean imports and call for a ban on the import of genetically-engineered soybean products. As the women from the slums of Delhi sing, ‘Sarson Bachao, Soya Bhagaa,’ or, ‘Save the Mustard, Dump the Soya’” (Shiva 2000).

Second, across the world, women have been leading the struggle to prevent commercial logging and save or rebuild forests, which are the foundation of people’s subsistence economies, providing nourishment as well as fuel, medicine, and communal relations. Forests, Shiva writes, echoing testimonies coming from every part of the planet, are “the highest expression of earth’s fertility and productivity” (Shiva 1989:56). Thus, when forests come under assault it is a death sentence for the tribal people who live in them, especially the woman. Therefore, women do everything to stop the loggers. Shiva often cites, in this context, the Chikpo movement—a movement of women, in Garhwal, in the foothills of the Himalaya who, beginning in the early 1970s, embrace the trees destined to fall and put their bodies between them and the saws when the loggers come (Shiva 1989).

While women in Garhwal have mobilized to prevent forests from being cut down, in villages of Northern Thailand they have protested the Eucalyptus plantations forcibly planted on their expropriated farms by a Japanese paper-making company with the support of the Thai military government (Matsui 1996:88-90). In Africa, an important initiative has been the “Green Belt Movement,” which under the leadership of Wangari Maathai is committed to planting a green belt around the major cities and, since 1977, has planted tens of millions of trees to prevent deforestation, soil loss, desertification, and fuel-wood scarcity (Maathai 1993).

But the most striking struggle for the survival of the forests is taking place in the Niger Delta, where the mangrove tree swamps are being threatened by oil production. Opposition to it has mounted for twenty years, beginning in Ogharefe, in 1984, when several thousand women from the area laid siege to Pan Ocean’s Production Station demanding compensation for the destruction of the water, trees, and land. To show their determination, the women also threatened to disrobe should their demands be frustrated—a threat they put in action when the company’s director arrived, so that he found himself surrounded by thousands of women naked, a serious curse in the eyes of the Niger Delta communities, which convinced him at the time to accept the reparation claims (Turner and Oshare 1994:140-141).

The struggle over land has also grown since the 1970s in the most unlikely place—New York City—in the form of an urban gardening movement. It began with the

initiative of a women-led group called the “Green Guerrillas,” who began cleaning up vacant lots in the Lower East Side. By the 1990s, eight hundred and fifty urban gardens had developed in the city and dozens of community coalitions had formed, such as the Greening of Harlem Coalition that was begun by a group of women who wanted “to reconnect with the earth and give children an alternative to the streets.” Now it counts more than twenty-one organizations and thirty garden projects (Wilson and Weinberg 1999:36).

It is important to note here that the gardens have been not only a source of vegetables and flowers, but have served community-building and have been a stepping stone for other community struggles (like squatting and homesteading). Because of this work, the women came under attack during Mayor Giuliani’s regime, and for some years now one of the main challenges this movement has faced has been stopping the bulldozers. Over last decade, a hundred gardens have been lost to “development,” more than forty have been slated for bulldozing, and the prospects for the future seem gloomy (Wilson and Weinberg 1999:61). Since his appointment, in fact, the mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, like his predecessor, has declared war on these gardens.

The Importance of the Struggle

As we have seen, in cities across the world at least a quarter of the people depend on food produced by women’s subsistence labor. In Africa, for example, a quarter of the people living in towns say they could not survive without subsistence food production. This is confirmed by the UN Population Fund which claims that “some two hundred million city dwellers are growing food, providing about one billion people with at least part of their food supply” (UN 2001). When we consider that the bulk of the food subsistence producers are women we can see why the men of Kedjom, Cameroon would say, “Yes, women subsistence farmers do good for humanity.” Thanks to them, the billions of people, rural and urban, who earn one or two dollars a day do not go under, even in time of economic crisis.

Equally important, women’s subsistence production counters the trend by agribusiness to reduce cropland—one of the causes of high food prices and starvation—while ensuring control over the quality of food and protecting consumers against manipulation of crops and poisoning by pesticides. Further, women subsistence production represents a safe way of farming, a crucial consideration at a time when the effects of pesticides on agricultural crops is causing high rates of mortality and

disease among peasants across the world, starting with women (see, for example, Settini et al 1999). Thus, subsistence farming gives women an essential means of control over their health and the health and lives of their families (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999).

Most important, we can also see that subsistence production is contributing to a non-competitive, solidarity-centered mode of life that is crucial for the building of a new society. It is the seed of what Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies call the “other” economy which “puts life and everything necessary to produce and maintain life on this planet at the center of economic and social activity and not the never-ending accumulation of dead money” (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999:5).

Notes

1. A detailed description of the land tenure system and women’s property rights in seven African countries—Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda is found in *Women and Land in Africa* (2003) by Muthoni L. Wanyeki. The author found that in general women control food crop production (in some countries like Uganda up to 90%) and control the benefits resulting from the sale of surplus crops. However, their right to own and inherit land is generally limited or denied especially in patrilineal cultures. African women have access to land according to customary laws, but they have users’ rights through their relations with men, through marriage or inheritance. In Latin America as well women’s land ownership rights have been extremely restricted, by means of “legal, cultural, and institutional” mechanisms rooted in a patriarchal ideology and patriarchal division of labor.. On this subject see Deere and León (2001) pp. 2-3.
2. In 1988, the ILO defined subsistence workers in agriculture and fishing as those who “provide food, shelter and a minimum of cash income for themselves and their households” (UN 1995:114)—a fuzzy definition depending on which notion of “minimum cash income” and “provision” one uses. Moreover, its operative meaning is derived from intentions, e.g., the subsistence workers’ lack of “market orientation,” and deficiencies they experience, such as having no access to formal credit and advanced technology.
3. The social and economic impact of colonialism varied greatly, depending (in part) on the duration of direct colonial control. We may even interpret the present differences in women’s participation in subsistence and cash-crop agriculture as a measure of the extent of colonial appropriation of land. Using the UN-ILO labor

force participation statistics, and remembering the measurement problem concerning subsistence farming, we see that sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of the female labor force in agriculture (75 percent); while in Southern Asia it is 55 percent; South-East Asia, 42 percent; and East Asia, 35 percent. By contrast, South and Central America have low women's participation rates in agriculture similar to those found in "developed" regions like Europe between 7 and 10 percent. That is, the participation rates roughly correlate with the duration of formal colonialism in the regions.

4. On the struggles of women farmers in western Cameroon in the 1950s, see also As Margaret Snyder and Mary Tadesse who write: "Women continued to persist in their economic activities during colonial times, despite the formidable odds they faced. One example is the way they mobilized to form corn mill societies in western Cameroun in the 1950s. Over time 200 such societies were formed with a total membership of 18,000. They used grinding mills that were owned in common, fenced their fields, and constructed water storage units and co-operative stores... In other words, 'for generations women established some form of collective actions to increase group productivity, to fill-in socio-economic gaps wherever the colonial administration failed, or to protest policies that deprived them of the resources to provide for their families.' " (Snyder and Tadesse 1995:23).
5. The crisis consists in the fact that if the domestic economy becomes too unproductive, it then fails to reproduce the immigrant worker, but if it becomes too productive, it drives up the costs of labor, as the worker in this case can avoid wage labor.
6. Exemplary here is Caroline Moser, a "World Bank feminist" who executes a very sophisticated analysis of the work of women and whose approach to women is, in her terms, "emancipatory." After presenting a careful analysis of the many theoretical approaches to women's labor (Marxist included), the case studies she examines are two "income generating" projects and a "food for work" scheme (Moser 1993:235-238).
7. However, as soon as the price of sugar on the world market went up, the plantation owner cut the time allotted to the slave for cultivation of their provision grounds.
8. See, e.g., what Michael Chege (1987:250) writes of African wage workers and the land: "...most African laborers maintain a foothold in the country side; the

existence of labor totally alienated from land ownership is yet to happen.” One of the consequences of this “lack of alienation” is that the African worker can rely on a material basis of solidarity (especially the provision of food) from the village whenever s/he decides to strike.

9. The attack waged by the World Bank through Structural Adjustment *falsifies* Meillassoux’s claim that the domestic economy is functional to capitalism, but *verifies* his prediction that a “final” crisis of capitalism looms because of its inability to preserve and control the domestic economy (Meillassoux 1981:141).
10. Witness the dramatic decline in the “real wage” and the increase in the rate of poverty in Nigeria. Once considered a “middle income” country, Nigeria now has 70 percent of its population living on less than one U.S. dollar a day, and 90 percent on less than two U.S. dollars a day (cf., UN Development Program statistics from its website).
11. In Bissau, women planted rice during the rainy season in plots on the peripheries of town. During the dry season more enterprising women try to get access to nearby plots in order to plant irrigated vegetables not only for domestic consumption but for sale (Galli and Funk 1995:20).
12. This report is based on an oral testimony at the Prague “Countersummit” of 2000.
13. Tripp concludes that “...the Kawaala struggle is in many ways a microcosm of some of the changes that are occurring in Uganda” (Tripp 2000:194). Similar struggles have been waged throughout the Third World, where peasant women’s organizations have opposed the development of industrial zones threatening to displace them and their families and contaminate the environment.
14. This attempt was given a boost in 1998 when the mustard seed cooking oil locally produced and distributed was mysteriously found to be adulterated to such a point that forty-one people died after consuming it. The government then banned its production and sale. The National Alliance responded by taking the case to court and calling on producers and consumers not to cooperate with the government’s ban (Shiva 2000:54).

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