

Preparing to Understand Feminism in the Twenty-First Century: Global Social Change, Women's Work, and Women's Movements

by

Torry D. Dickinson
Women's Studies Program
3 Leasure Hall
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506
E-mail: dickins@ksu.edu

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MAKING CONNECTIONS: GLOBAL SOCIAL CHANGE, WOMEN'S WORK AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

The history of women's non-wage work, women's wage labor, and contemporary women's movements can be understood with greater clarity if studies of "globalization," feminism, and the capitalist world-economy are examined in relationship to each other. Today many women's movements clearly reflect, respond to, and attempt to shape changes in wage (employer-organized) and non-wage (labor-organized) work relations. This paper is a conceptual, theoretical and historical exploration of how scholars, who study inter-related global areas, can prepare to do research on women's work and women's movements that will contribute to the development of "globalization," feminist, and world-economy scholarship.

Non-wage and wage work, gender relations, and women's movements develop within a changing global context, which continues to be largely shaped by the world-economy.

Changes in wage and non-wage work are shaped by, what appears to be, a new cycle of expansion of the world-economy. This expansion rests on past and possibly ongoing reductions in benefits for many sectors of global labor. The global economy grows partly because of a variety of changes between capital and labor, including real wage reductions, the creation of more part-time and temporary positions, and the ability of capital and the state to get laboring households to assume more responsibility for their own reproduction. As labor becomes redefined globally, work relations are also becoming more highly differentiated across the face of the globe, reflecting growing global and possibly intra-zonal inequalities. In addition to growing polarization within the world-economy, it appears that there may be an emerging differentiation between work that is organized within the world-economy and work that takes place in de-linked areas of the world, outside of capital's global orbit. Both these sets of differentiated and often unequal developments are shaped by the direction the world-economy has been taking in the last two decades.

Although my research is in a preliminary stage, I am struck by global-, regional- and household-level evidence that suggests that recent investments have gone more to the core, with less investments going to many areas in the semi periphery and periphery. The frequent use of the concept "globalization" perpetuates the image that commercialized relations are uniformly invading all corners of the earth. However, historical evidence points in another direction and suggests that an intensification of some forms of uneven development has taken place (Dickinson 1997). Even a proponent of the global convergence thesis admits, "the expanding global system still seems to be rewarding the same old folks in the same economic centers" (Greider 1997: 32).

As they have decreased their investments in Latin America, U.S. businesses in the core have increased their private and direct manufacturing investments. In fact, between 1950 and 1988, U.S. private investments in Europe increased from 15 percent to almost 50 percent. Global foreign direct investments fell in the periphery,¹ declining from 25 percent of all private investments in 1980 to 17 percent in 1989 (Maitra 1996: 93-96). In addition, the external debt of especially some Latin American and sub-Saharan African countries grew tremendously between 1980 and 1990 (Kenwood and Lougheed 1992: 254-255). The United States and Western Europe continue to invest in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which are slightly less privileged parts of the core. A number of new areas have been tapped, including Eastern Europe (especially the Moscow area), China's coastal regions, and other selected enclaves in the periphery (Remnick 1997: 84; Maitra 1996: 93). Of course, the full range of profit-generating mechanisms, which link the South and North, need to be identified and analyzed. In order to examine these trends, it is critical that empirical evidence be gathered on social change in the last five years.²

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The concept "selective globalization" places emphasis on the very uneven development of the world-economy and may help to change the ways that "globalization" is defined and applied. In the United States and elsewhere, the concept "globalization" helped to broadly communicate the idea that the global economy keeps on changing by establishing new production sites and by changing in scope. Although we do live in a world dominated by a global economy, development is not characterized by a general process that can be described by the simple, uniform term "globalization." Rather, studies of global processes, inter-regional relationships, and household differentiation indicate that companies are pursuing more contained and less risky investment strategies. Carefully orchestrated corporate and state policies mean that investments are highly intensified in some areas and less evident in others. To many, "globalization" creates an image of how large companies and international monetary organizations change the ways we live and the ways we are connected. Rather than dropping this term that helped to educate many, I chose to modify the concept by placing emphasis on the very uneven, unequal and core-centered development that is taking place in the world.

In terms of how the general public talks about global change, "globalization" has begun to replace some popular terms and everyday conversational phrases that describe the world-economy. These terms include "the system," "the military industrial complex," and "the forces that be," which emphasize an entrenched state of being. Although "globalization" refers to the process of creating the world around us, it stresses uniformity and universal commodification. This widely used concept fails to emphasize the fact that the growth of the world-economy (re)creates hierarchy and inequality. I have placed the word "selective" before "globalization" in order to build on the general interest that "globalization" has generated. Perhaps "selective globalization" can serve as a transitional concept that will help recast how "globalization" is perceived and defined. This new concept is designed to focus attention on divisions that come from the world-economy, including those that develop along gender lines. Perhaps a new term is not needed for world-economy scholars who try to differentiate between particular processes of accumulation. However, U.S. intellectuals and journalists usually do not use world-systems concepts in their everyday work; and when they do, these concepts often are distorted and taken out of context. Since educators in public and private institutions address how people around the world are affected by social change, teachers and researchers have a responsibility to communicate with people outside of academia. If we cannot, we will need interpreters, and then there will be an even greater chance that our concerns will be lost.

Women's work and women's movements are greatly influenced by the highly selective development of the world-economy. Especially in the 1980's and 1990's, the global economy has expanded in highly selective ways, increasing the gap between highly invested areas and largely bypassed or de-linked areas.³ In his response to the Report on the South Commission, Samir Amin refers to two types of de-linking, and both these are of interest here because they affect women's work, women's options, and women's politics. Amin argues that the ways that competition occurs between Europe, United States and Japan will affect how "globalization" proceeds. Possible developments include the "partial negation" of the world-economy's expansion by "the construction of regional

groupings and/or by the de-linking of regions in the periphery." In addition, Amin writes, there is always the possibility of labor's localized, intentional de-linking from the world-economy, or "the submission of external relationships to the needs of internal development" (Amin 1993: 135, 138). Both unintentional de-linking that is prompted by global competition and labor's intentional de-linking seem to be taking place in the world today. And if women's work, women's options, and social movements are to be more readily understood, then the selective character of global investment must be taken into consideration.

Developing an understanding of today's world requires world-economy scholars to reach out to related areas of scholarship and to scholars who operate outside of the boundaries that often contain world-systems research. Studying women's work and movements means crossing boundaries between communities of scholars who may feel at theoretical and methodological odds with each other. Unfortunately, scholars who study "globalization," women's work and movements, and world-systems research often are isolated from each other. These separate groups of scholars usually do not analyze social trends in collaborative learning and research environments, where they can meet face-to-face and figure out where the world is headed. If scholars are to understand global social change processes, they will need to listen to, interact with, and possibly work collaboratively with researchers in at least three related research areas: "globalization" studies, Women's Studies, and world-economy studies. The multi-disciplinary, holistic approach taken here is designed to help redirect "globalization" research and feminist scholarship in more concrete directions, and to expand and deepen scholarship on the world-economy. Along with ethnic studies researchers and others, this broad grouping of scholars can contribute a great deal to the study of the transformation of multi-layered global hierarchies.

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USING A FEMINIST SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE TO EXAMINE "GLOBALIZATION"

With the exception of a small number of feminist and world-economy scholars, twenty years ago few scholars in the North accepted the idea that a global profit-making system had been one of the primary forces determining the destiny of the world's people. The climate has shifted with the decline of U.S. hegemony, bringing a widespread, but often superficial understanding that North American economic and social life is affected by the global economy. In municipal meetings and during coffee breaks at local diners, U.S. residents now acknowledge that global production can mean that some working families may suffer as large and small companies participate in the accumulation race. The more overt need-to-compete ideology in the United States has become almost larger than life as public schools claim to produce world-class workers, and as even under-lit workshops with semi-skilled employees and outdated technology claim that they now are "world

class companies" (Grubb et al. 1992). Today more academics, executive branch officials, Congressional members, financial journalists and business owners mention the bottom-line, end-of-quarter considerations of global production and the imperative for companies to become more competitive in the global race for profits and economic survival.

Although countries and political organizations have been decrying aspects of global capitalism sometimes for decades, sometimes for centuries (including those with anti-imperialist messages), suddenly "globalization" has been discovered in the United States and elsewhere, too. The U.S. work force has been taught that, in post-1970's structural development, a "new" global economy requires employers and the state to take low-cost "offshore" labor almost as seriously as they take U.S. labor. Partly because most U.S. workers have not seriously thought about global labor in the past, corporations' re-education efforts dictating new world-economic rules of operation have, with one blow, ruptured U.S. laboring families' assumed total cultural supremacy vis-a-vis the rest of global labor. Popular understandings of global change typically relate to labor's recent civic lesson: North Americans live in a global world that may adversely affect working people's lives, including their own.

Within this late twentieth-century context, some academics and writers who do research on "globalization" have defined this process as essentially the unchecked, universal spread and intensification of manufacturing and consumer relations across the face of the globe (Greider 1997; Rifkin 1995; Aronowitz and Difazio 1994; Barnett and Cavanagh 1994). The introduction of more open discussion about the global profit-making system is a welcome change from previous decades of silence, but the standard convergence-centered approach taken by some analysts of global trends is more than disturbing. The idea that global convergence is inevitable veers sharply from growing evidence of new levels of divergence in the last one or two decades.

Although there is a global system that affects almost everything in today's world in some way, work relations and women's everyday lives reveal incredible social and economic diversity. Rather than a gradual leveling and slow replication of consumer-centered, urban-industrial life in every part of the world, the social and economic diversity in women's and men's lives suggests that global capitalism may be directly and indirectly fragmenting humanity in more ways than before. There probably has not been this much work-based diversity since the mid-twentieth century, when almost all the world's people found themselves dependent on the world-economy for basic survival. As the twenty-first century is ushered in, the development of the world-economy is not just increasing the separation between rich and poor, but increasing the gender divide. There also appears to be the very significant introduction of a growing split between those who are in the global economic system and those who are increasingly left out of it (Dickinson 1997).

Furthermore, it is hard not to be struck by the uneven checkerboard, patchwork, or quilted appearance of today's world, which increasingly differentiates areas within nation-states, making parts of the North seem more like parts of the South, and areas in the South seem like parts of the North. Of course, the structural division between the North and South remains. But the North's "Third World-like" areas (such as inner-city

Detroit and abandoned rural enclaves) have witnessed the disappearance of some jobs, the decline of state subsidies and services, and a vanishing of the hope that economic mobility is possible with education. But when these growing losses are looked at in relation to the South, the North's economic, political and social advantages are highlighted. Likewise, manufacturing factories and neighborhoods in export enclaves in the semi periphery and periphery may more closely resemble wage-dependent manufacturing areas in the North (especially as they looked in the past), but low individual wages, the relative lack of political freedom, and sparse state services indicate that major differences develop. One consequence of the differentiation within zones may be that women in the North and South can now find more common ground, giving them greater ease as they talk about and address their globally-related differences. Women from the South and North have talked about their different, but related positions in the global system during the Women's Linking for Change Conference in 1994, the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995, and the Women's Day on Food Conference in Rome in 1996 (Sweetman 1994).[4](#)

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When I read the "globalization" literature, I find myself wrestling with contemporary definitions of a worldwide process that allegedly broadens and deepens the rule of the capitalist market everywhere. I try to approach my examination of the "globalization" thesis by examining today's empirical trends in relationship to past global economic patterns. As I do this, many questions are generated, and I become critical of the strong emphasis on the newness of "globalization." Isn't "globalization" today's more generally acceptable name for something that many people have studied and fought for a long time? Doesn't the concept "globalization" cover up just as much as it reveals? To many critics of full-blown commercialization, the concept "globalization" fortunately is used to emphasize the despotic side of change. But for others, isn't "globalization" another way of saying economic development has become unleashed primarily through the late twentieth-century forms of global manufacturing sweatshops and global consumer marketing (promoting, for example, the dispersion of Nike running shoes and Levi jeans)?

However, although some suggest that a universalizing market compels consumers to complete more final moments of capital accumulation, these researchers may unknowingly hit a wall the minute they confront evidence that jeans often are sold at regional markets as recycled goods in the Third World. Furthermore, right next to sellers of used jeans, assault rifles and stolen Mercedes are women and girls whose main source of income is selling sexual services.[5](#) Just like so many modernization analysts did in the past, some contemporary writers reproduce assumptions about the inevitability of globalized investments, the spread of First World consumerism, and the promise of worldwide "economic growth" in ways that often are stripped away from their ever-

present counterparts of underdevelopment and underemployment. In doing so, these scholars fail to examine alternative trajectories for global and regional developments.

Although they may discuss trends in overly generalized ways, researchers who are concerned about the adverse consequences of global commodification have helped to legitimize the exploration of global issues. This is a helpful educational advance. Today it is rare to go to feminist conferences on women's work without hearing the word "globalization." Using this concept as a backdrop, feminist educators talk about the very real effects of stepped-up corporate invasion in some areas of the world. I hear about how ongoing corporate commercialization affects women farmers through the seizure of their resources, the patenting of their seeds, and the imposition of multinationals' farm equipment, fertilizers, pesticides, and expropriatory gene manipulations (Mies and Shiva 1993). I hear about how teen girls and young women are sucked into the centripetal webs of export-producing factories that acquaint them with the global assembly lines' repetitive monotony, unhealthy and cruel working conditions, low wages and often sad, crowded worker-dorm life (Kung, 1983; Ong, 1997; Wolf, 1992; Tiano, 1994; Safa, 1995). Then, there always is the fundamental (but too often unmentioned) issue of the growing traffic in women, and the expropriation of women's bodies for the global sex industry (Altink 1995; Skrobanek et. al 1997; Coquery-Vidrovitch [1994] 1997:128).

Although there are exceptions, what I rarely hear at feminist conferences are critical analyses of the concept "globalization." The overwhelming relief that comes with being able to mention and study global systemic influences has created its own barriers to doing critical research. Feminist scholars, like so many others, often do not move beyond using the overly general "globalization" framework, even though there is ample historical evidence that they probably should.

Just when research on women's work and women's movements seems like it should get easier, it is necessary to take the time to see what the popular definition of "globalization" explains and what it does not. Furthermore, as enthusiastic as scholars are about the important research that shows how women's lives are affected by transnational penetration (through the global commodification of seeds, for example), this international penetration model may not provide a metaphor for all global developments affecting women. Although all parts of the world are influenced by the ways that the global profit-making system develops, they are not changed in the same way.

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Rather than reproducing the cultural shock that came with U.S. labor's recognition that U.S. power declined, educational work in the university should include figuring out what actually is going on in today's world, based on the full composite of work-related trends and relationships that are unfolding. Comprehensive, multi-disciplinary research must be done in a variety of related fields if changes in women's work and women's diverse

struggles are to be understood. A critical part of this project involves placing women and girls, non-wage work and wage work, and female and male relationships at the heart of social and historical analysis. When women, girls and their work are examined as part of labor--and not just added on or seen separately--the whole world can be seen in a different way.

KNITTING TOGETHER AN EXPANDED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND OPENING UP THE STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Today some global scholars clearly are beginning to question the idea that capital accumulation is running unchecked, commodifying all untouched and all incompletely commodified areas of life, and tightly binding all low-wage rural women and men to the transnational orbit of global production (Amin 1993). This type of critical thinking about the unchecked global commodification thesis needs to be supplemented with the identification and development of alternative explanatory frameworks. The earth's people are not facing equal levels of capitalist invasiveness, nor are they facing equal levels of homogenizing and fragmentary pressures associated with development of the capitalist world-economy. Although it has been predicted that "globalization" will eventually level out economic disparities for the world's population (Greider 1997), there is no evidence that this is a worldwide trend. On the contrary, there is substantial empirical evidence that suggests that the integrating forces of the world-economy actually create growing polarization and differentiation, both within the system and through the creation of a small number of regions that seem to be becoming external to the system.

Today's social trends are both a continuation of and a rupture with past world-economic trends. The development of the world-economy, as it has been since the initial days of global production for profit, is a combined and uneven process. The social nature of the capitalist world-economy has not changed in any fundamental sense, although the system began going through a new period of structural development during the mid-1970s. In recent decades, capital accumulation seems to have become a highly differentiated and, for many parts of the world, a more highly commodified process. This has led to the formation of new complexes of wage and non-wage work relations throughout the world, often resulting in highly polarized gender relations.

The North continues to have relatively high wages (although real incomes have declined), and households have different degrees of access to many state-supported services and income transfers, including public education, limited medical care and limited unemployment support. Although regional, ethnic, and gender variations abound within the North and the South, and within countries in the North and the South, the gender and ethnic stratification that is inherent in the world-economy still provides indirect benefits to a minority in the North. These wage-based, social service and political benefits cannot be divorced from two major indirect sources: the self-organized work and the greatly undervalued labor of the world's majority. The burden that has been imposed on women, especially in the South, has grown in the last ten or twenty years. Although women historically have done most of labor's self-organized work (which has included growing and transforming most food for their families), feminist scholars usually argue that

women in both the North and South now do more work (Blumberg et al. 1995). Though both groups of women now do more unpaid work and possibly even more underpaid wage labor, the structural divide between them has remained firmly in place.

If the last twenty years of trends in investments and related underdevelopment help forecast what the next twenty years will bring, more uneven development (not global convergence) appears to be on the horizon. Transnational investment, a core-center phenomenon, links certain low-income regions to the core, and bypasses others. Investing by core-based transnational corporations and by states appears to be a highly selective process, one that often creates and revolves around rising and sometimes quickly deserted export-enclaves. And employers in these enclaves have tended to employ many young and middle-years women. Partly through the mechanisms of export enclave creation and disinvestment, today's global economy continues to create linkages between the South and the North, carving and transfiguring asymmetrical and highly unequal pathways of accumulation. "Selective globalization," a concept that was designed to encourage "globalization" scholarship to become more concrete, refers to the systemically-rooted intensification of changes in combined and uneven development that occur as part of capitalist development in the post-U.S. hegemonic period. This uneven and combined development includes, not just the development of past forms, but the "patchwork" spread of core-based investments and the emergence of growing, de-commodified social relations in some regions of the world. The decline of worldwide capitalist relations in some areas has begun to occur as limited involuntary and voluntary de-linkage with the world-economy has taken place.

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As part of uneven global development, two general social and economic processes seem to be taking place. First, the expansion and intensification of capitalist investments in production continues to occur, increasing the level of commodification in many areas of the world, especially in the core, and simultaneously expelling some laborers from production. Expansion is also evident with the growth of global assembly lines in the semi periphery and periphery, the spread of more capital-intensive agricultural estates in the South, and the explosion in the traffic in women. Of course, the North makes a large portion of its profits from the South largely through debt collection, a process which yields commercial profits from past core-based investments in the periphery. The "underside" of this expansion also continues to unfold in large portions of the world, creating underemployment and poverty, which has always accompanied global investments and capital accumulation. When some transnationals' investments in production declined in the South, regional capitalists may have had more room to accumulate,⁷ but they have also continued to create poverty. Some individual laborers are being expelled from capitalist production as a result of the recent application of new capital-intensive technologies, leading to the decommodification of household relations and the growth of non-capitalist income generation.

Second, new non-capitalist economic activities seem to be developing outside of the rule of the world-economy. The decrease in transnationals' direct investments in portions of the periphery, areas which transnational corporations and banks seem to have at least temporarily "redlined," has led to the decommodification of labor in these areas and its removal from direct capitalist control by transnationals and sometimes other employers. In addition, a small proportion of former laboring households seem to have chosen to live outside the global market.

Both these capitalist and external processes shape work and gender relations, creating transformed relationships between labor and capital and changing the ways that wage and non-wage work are connected at the level of households. At the center of these macro- and micro-processes are women and the ways their work is defined and valued. Because women have been socially designated to be the primary group of the world's non-wage workers, and the burdens associated with this role seem to be growing in many areas of the world-economy, women are placed in a central social location as commodification and decommodification develop side-by-side.

But how can capitalist production be intensifying and create more intertwined market-defined webs at the same time that once-commodified labor is becoming de-linked from the world-economy? Businesses are reaching into new areas that have been underutilized as far as ranching, mining and logging companies are concerned, and at the same time, there seems to be a gradual disinvestment from particular pieces of land and a limited disengagement of labor. Both commodification and decommodification processes are taking place simultaneously, and they are affecting workers and their relationships to land. Some of the world's social spaces are becoming more commodified or re-commodified, and others are undergoing a process of de-commodification. The further commodification of labor in some locales takes place separately from its de-commodification in other locations. At the same time that land is being commodified and re-commodified by large-scale producers, laborers on that land can be de-commodified. We are so taken by the image of capitalist production spreading across the face of the globe that it is hard to imagine the integrated, system-driven "reverse" of this process: the decline of some commodified work relations, as well as the decline of commodified land in some areas. For example, in some U.S. inner cities, in particular U.S. rural areas, and in large portions of Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, labor and sometimes land appear to be undergoing a process of decommodification. It is unclear how long this "reversal" process will continue. The decline of commodified labor and/or land takes place at the same time that commercial goods like "Coke" replace women's homemade fruit drinks, and at the same time that garment producers lure young women into manufacturing establishments with the promise of sufficient wages for purchasing factory-made soap and other "luxuries" (Wolf, 1992).

Economic trends shaping women's wage and non-wage work are complex and overlapping, connecting employment, under- and unemployment, and economic exclusion. Although there are many increasingly commodified spheres in today's world, global economic development is not a process of global convergence that primarily brings higher wage export manufacturing jobs to women who used to toil in the fields or,

for example, who used to sell chewing gum on the street for a pittance. This global economic process is not about gradually equalizing wages or offering expanded "opportunities" to a new generation of girls in the semi periphery and periphery. Ultimately global development is about establishing new forms of inequality and restratifying world labor.

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A review of literature on "globalization" and female manufacturing workers in export enclaves highlights three points about engendered paid employment, wage-related non-wage work, and work tasks that largely fall outside of the system. First, today's global transformations bring little security to young female workers, who find themselves in a pool of recycling female labor, playing company-controlled musical chairs, and knowing that they most likely will be replaced by the time they become "adults." This manufacturing track for young females definitely can develop next to male employment tracks and male employment life cycles, and not appear to interfere with them. Different employment tracks for females and males, young people and adults, people of color and whites, and Third World workers and First World workers all lower global wage levels for the world's workers. Superficially, it appears that labor pools are not related, but all laboring groups are closely tied together through both the world-economy's competitive anarchy and the implementation of corporate strategies.

If scholars expand their scope and look at global production beyond export enclaves, they would also see the world-economy's multi-layered tracks of workers in diverse transnational and state sectors. If they expand the scope of analysis, research would focus less on how female workers are replacing well-established male wage laborers and more on how women and children generally are becoming impoverished. This would entail more discussion about how female and male workers both face harder times. Analyses of "the feminization of the labor force" need to be supplemented with discussions of the challenges faced by the divided group of world labor. They also should include an analysis of the highly disorganized, remaining portion of the world's workers who do not have access to wage incomes at this time, and who may not access them in the future.

Of great importance is the extent to which individual laborers and households have become partially or fully disengaged from capitalist production. Within this context, it is hard to miss seeing the significance of the world's refugee camps, where women and children predominate. In general, refugee camps do not represent enclosures of labor, but enclosures of non-labor, or labor that has been transformed into workers who have started to live outside of capitalist production. Likewise, the growing pool of intra-national and international migrants, and those family members who are left behind, doubtlessly include large numbers of disengaged laborers, who survive by supporting themselves outside of the system and/or by figuring out ways to partially re-enter the global system of production.

GLOBAL SOCIAL CHANGE PROCESSES, WOMEN'S WAGE AND NON-WAGE WORK, AND WOMEN'S SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENTS

In summary, women's social change activities and movements develop within the global context of both the contradictory forces of the world-economy (which stratify and fragment world labor) and the still very limited disengagement of labor from capitalist production. These movements both respond to and shape complex changes in wage and non-wage work; they help to define the various directions that social relations may take. Although contemporary women's struggles address different aspects of social life in diverse contexts, these struggles often emerge from or relate to work-based situations. These work-based situations include, for example, working to reclaim the commons as gardening or biomass generation areas, fighting the effects of toxic poisoning in landfills and water sources, demanding the right to organize factory workers in export enclaves, and organizing to establish women-centered producing and marketing networks (Leonard, 1995; Blumberg, 1995; Scott, Kaplan and Keates, 1997).

By focusing on women's actions in relation to changes in wage and non-wage work, many seemingly different women's movements can be related to each other. [8](#) Understanding relationships between women's movements by analyzing changes in the world-economy, wage labor, and non-wage work is a concrete, multi-dimensional, research approach. This approach could contribute to the reduction of fragmentary research done on feminist movements. An integral part of this approach would include studying women's and men's work that occurs in work situations that are becoming at least temporarily severed from wage labor and capitalist production.

Some feminist scholars have been moving in this direction, and their intellectual leadership helps everyone who recognizes the need to link together gender analysis, "globalization" studies, and world-economy research. However, this scholarship seems to be limited in various ways. In some cases, abstract notions of "globalization" and commodification sometimes hide fundamental

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contributions (Mies 1991; Mies, Bennholdt-Thomsen and Von Werlhof 1991; Mies and Shiva 1993). Although I find ethnographic analyses of households and gender in different regions to be especially compelling, many writers fail to use their empirical materials to help develop comprehensive theories (Blumberg et al. 1995). Well-researched case studies of women in export enclaves sometimes are presumed to take place within "a new international division of labor;" but, by choosing a flat, largely unexamined backdrop, these writers may not directly compel readers to examine how regional changes in women's work and women's protests can contribute to a more sophisticated theoretical understanding of the world-economy (Wolf 1992; Tiano 1994; Safa 1995). Edited collections on women's work and movements often document the details of women's

lives, but these articles often neglect to show how "feminisms" are more than just expressions of "cultural differences" within a diverse world (Momsen and Kinnard 1993; Basu 1995; Scott et al. 1997). There is a need to build on this sound base of research by engaging in comparative, multi-cultural discussions that try to link trends in women's lives with an understanding about the direction(s) that the world-economy is taking.

One way to link social change at global and regional levels is by studying gender relations through the institutions of the household and class.⁹ Women's movements can be more fully understood if women's lives are thought about in relation to the global transformation of workers' householding continuum. This global continuum of laboring households goes from households that rely heavily on subsistence work and low-paid wage labor (predominantly in the periphery) to those households that rely on high wages, state transfers and services, and very market dependent reproduction (predominantly in the core).¹⁰ Women have bridged the social spheres of this householding continuum, actively organizing the social relations that enable households to generate income from wage and non-wage work. Women have also been designated by the state as reproducers of labor and, therefore, are intimately affected by family and welfare policies. Particularly in the late twentieth century, when women's non-wage work burden is extremely heavy, women are centrally located in the heart of rapidly changing wage and non-wage relations. Women's work-related movements and social actions, therefore, form pivotal centers of global labor movements, as well as representing gender-related protests.

Women organize where there are work- and income-related pressure points, and the locations of these pressure points differ. In the core, as the state has cut transfer payments to "low- and middle-income" households, working women have struggled to maintain state transfers and state-organized services.¹¹ In the semi periphery, where girls and young to middle-years women form the bulk of assembly line laborers, workers have been organizing to form unions and to increase wages in export-oriented factories. Women in especially the periphery have fought to maintain their access to natural resources, which are needed if women are to carry out much of their subsistence and marketing work (Leonard 1995). Women's fights against environmental degradation often relate directly to their struggles around non-wage work.¹² In general, household and women's needs emerge in relation to changes in the total complex of work and household income; this includes wage work, income support from employers, state income transfers and services, and the gendered division of labor and work. Women's political actions emerge in relationship to global, regional and local shifts in wage and non-wage work. There are multiple causes of these shifts. Selective transnational investments, the general decline in real wages, reductions in state support and services, wars and famine, and environmental degradation have disrupted household relationships, leading to more migration, more female-headed households, and more economic and social burdens for women.

In the last few years, women's political actions have centered around diverse work- and income-related areas, including: strikes by Mexican teachers and Southeast Asian assembly line workers, public campaigns against U.S. and Western European welfare

cuts, fights in the school system against the eventual restriction of employment opportunities for South Korean girls, efforts to increase access to land for gardening (such as land-owning female farmers who share their land with other women in Vancouver), and the creation of new female marketing networks in regions in Canada, Germany and Sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these social change efforts were discussed at the Women's Day on Food Conference in 1996, as well as at the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995.[13](#)

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Because laboring women and other household members do both wage and non-wage work, it may be impossible to draw a clear line between the political activities organized by wage-dependent women and disengaged women who have been expelled from wage labor. Even in the most wage-dependent and consumer-oriented households in the core, women almost always need to combine income from wage labor, non-wage work, and state transfer payments. It may be useful to study whether the lives of once wage-dependent women intersect frequently with partially wage-dependent women, who engage in daily or regular non-wage activities to supplement their households' low wages. It is time to consider how often the political pathways of wage-dependent and ageless women cross as they, for example, fight to maintain their biomass plantations that yield fodder, firewood, and a source of marketing income, or as they organize small scale vending and petty producing operations (Sarin 1995; Jhabvala 1994). It may be useful to determine which women's actions spring from conditions of wage dependency (as much "casualized" labor does), and to determine which actions grow out of situations where women and their households are organizing, controlling and benefiting from their own work. In many cases, women's political actions often take place within a cross-gender context, where women struggle next to men, and where women's issues become blurred and often obscured.

The specific sets of labor and work relations in regions and zones of the world-economy shape the types of women's struggles that emerge in these areas. In the core, where the levels of wage-and state-dependency are the highest, women's movements tend to center around wage employment practices and the decline in state transfer payments. Rural and urban residents consider establishing cooperative networks and evaluate the benefits of establishing women's centered production, marketing and trade networks. In some cases, women conceive of their de-linking actions as "dropping out of the system," "getting off the grid," or "short circuiting" the system (Douthwaite 1996).

In the United States, petty producing networks are growing in the areas of service work, newly produced and resold consumer goods, and vegetable, fruit and flower selling. However, many self-employment activities are organized by individuals and households and do not involve larger women's networks. In inner cities that face corporate disinvestment, where many women have been disengaged from wage labor (but not from

most system-derived market relationships, and often not from all state transfer payments) self-employment networks have grown. In places where poverty has been addressed as a serious issue (such as Chicago), women have started to value re-centering household and community relationships around their small businesses and income-generating properties.

New kinds of connections are developing between women in the North and in the South. For example, because women in the North recognize that new, higher-paying work situations need to be created for women, they often have adopted and modified "Third World" self-employment strategies. Reflecting a rejuvenated kind of economic and social exchange, the global fair trade movement links primarily female consumers with women who usually produce craft goods in Third World countries. In addition, women in the core, including Japan, have aligned with women in the semi periphery and periphery to fight the exploitation of girls and women in the global sex industry. For example, the Asian Women's Human Rights Council met in Tokyo in 1994 and held an open tribunal on the traffic in women (Skrobanek et al. 1997: 81).

Because of the diverse mixture of First and Third World forms of work and social reproduction, women's movements in the semi periphery try to shape income-related relations in many ways. This includes:

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- pushing the state to maintain or create "upper mobility" pathways through schooling and intra- and international migration
- limiting agro-industrial expansion
- gaining higher wages and wage-related benefits (including on the global assembly line)
- improving working conditions
- organizing casualized workers (in capitalist production and in self-employment)
- fighting to freeze consumer-good prices
- seizing food destined for foreign and urban markets
- reducing the level of environmental degradation
- improving women's access to natural resources

- establishing women-centered and community-based producing and marketing networks.

Analyses of women's environmental movements suggest that women's environmental actions in most parts of the world can be directly linked to needs related to non-wage work, or to objections to the destruction of natural resources by mineral extractors, large-scale agricultural companies, and industrial producers. Women's environmental movements work to preserve resources for the future. However, saving trees, growing bio-mass, fighting water and land pollution, and protesting the use of agricultural pesticides all have to do with preserving natural resources required for subsistence or marketing work, and with guaranteeing the health and safety of family members.

In the periphery, higher levels of impoverishment, corporate disinvestment, and the severing of some workers from wage labor have meant that many women's struggles center around the less commodified types of non-wage work. Women's environmental movements represent a very important part of the struggle to maintain, develop and protect resources for non-wage work. Women's work often becomes readjusted around the migration of adult males, contributing to the development of householding strategies that involve all remaining household members (Asian Exchange 1995:12). In some sub-Saharan countries, where women have few rights in terms of owning and inheriting land, one-half to two-thirds of families have female-headed households (Leonard 1995). Women from these countries frequently establish local production, marketing and/or trade networks that bypass middlemen. The combined pressures of austerity measures, low-wages, low levels of remuneration for self-organized producing and marketing work, and the rapid disinvestment in sub-Saharan Africa and South America by many First World transnational corporations makes the establishment of women- and community-centered economic relationships, not just a choice, but sometimes the only option for survival and development.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: STUDYING GLOBAL SOCIAL CHANGE AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Uncovering contemporary relations of uneven development, including the selective process of capitalist expansion, selective corporate disinvestment, and labor's forced (and occasionally chosen) de-linking from wage labor, provides a framework in which to develop a more comprehensive analysis of women's wage and non-wage work and related women's struggles to reshape the social world. Preliminary research on this topic suggests that many contemporary women's movements emerge within the context of non-wage and wage relations. The state's reduced support for the reproduction of labor also has served as an important focus for addressing work-related issues. These movements, which center around women and their work, have been emerging as the work hierarchy and related gender hierarchy become restructured. In the last two decades, many women have felt increased economic pressures as they have assumed more responsibility for the reproduction of their households. Economic development often has particularly painful consequences for girls and women who are systemically exploited and marginalized. This includes, but is not limited to exploitation by the global sex industry and by garment and

electronics manufacturers in export enclaves. This systemic marginalization and exploitation affects women's politics, placing emphasis on the intimate overlap between women's non-wage work and their wage labor.

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There are many related women's movements that are both overtly and less overtly connected together at the global level by women's organizations and by more informal social action networks. Women in the South and the North engage in dialogue on common problems and social differences born of the global division of labor, while at the same time there exists a tremendous amount of cross-fertilization between wage- and non-wage movements. Women's movements in the periphery, particularly those related to self-employment and non-traditional credit-granting mechanisms, have directly influenced women's movements in the core, just as women in the core have influenced women's political perceptions elsewhere. Both in the South and in the North, women have tried to expand and institutionalize new income-generating options for women. The development of women's credit-granting organizations and peer lending circles (originally created in Bangladesh) have provided a model for women's organizations to expand women's work options. When they organized women's peer lending circles, for example, Chicago's Women's Self-Employment Project (WSEP) and San Francisco's Women's Initiative for Self-Employment (WISE) both drew their inspiration from Bangladesh's Grameen Bank. On the global assembly line, women and unions affiliated with the electronics industry have discussed the possibility of organizing a global, industry-wide union for over a decade. However, many international conferences that involve women from the South and North have created new global initiatives, as well as influencing policy agendas of nation-states. These cross-hemispheric efforts contribute to the creation of new globally-linked women's movements, which largely have operated on a day-to-day basis at local and regional levels.

In conclusion, this analysis of how to study women, their work and their movements ultimately takes us back to labor, and to men. Women carry out the types of work they do largely because of the ways that the world-economy has constructed labor. With the development of more core-centered investments, the world-economy has started to push more working individuals and their families outside of its economic jurisdiction, or outside of the global profit-making system. However, women's work in all its forms has provided a reproductive base for capital, for labor, and for all household members. In fact, women's movements form a central part of labor's political actions, and women's protests need to be taken in account when world-economy and "globalization" scholars study labor movements. As much as feminist scholars need to examine gender relations in relation to concrete global processes, world-economy and "globalization" scholars should also examine women's work and politics as an integral, informative, and constituent part of world-economy and "globalization" studies. This will enable multi-disciplinary researchers to identify new aspects of social change, and to acquire a greater

appreciation of how female and male workers are influencing the world around them.

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Endnotes

1. The attitude of rich countries toward poor countries has been called "indifferent imperialism" by Robert Schaeffer in Power to the People: Democratization Around the World, pp. 244-245.

2. By gathering descriptions of social change at the regional, community, and household levels, I began studying contemporary trends with Robert Schaeffer. In 1996, we presented "The Workers' World: Wage Labor, Non-Waged Work and Class Struggle" at the American Sociological Association Conference, which was held in New York City. Currently we are working on a book, which will be entitled "The Workers' World: The Global Transformation of Women's and Men's Work" (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield), forthcoming.

3. Maria Mies used the term "de-link" in 1986. She writes that "the political decision of overdeveloped countries to de-link from the exploitative world-market system and to establish self-sufficiency" will support the development of autarkic development in Third World. See Maria Mies, Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour, p. 222-224.

4. Swasti Mitter writes that grassroots feminist movements are "in favor of a more caring, sharing, and cooperative economic structure". Women in the North have been trying to adopt and modify approaches that have been tried in the South. These models include GABRIELA (a women's movement in the Philippines that tries to help women and men by breaking the nation-state's ties with economic and military powers). The Self-Employed Women's Association in India (SEWA) also has provided a comprehensive model for addressing women's economic, social and family needs. See Swasti Mitter, "Women Working Worldwide." In eds., Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham, Materialist Feminism, pp. 163-174, p. 169.

5. Journalists have been documenting the widespread development of markets for used clothing, stolen goods, and recycled and reconditioned goods. New York Times, Monday, August 22, 1994, A1, C1; Saturday, April 20, 1996, A3; Friday, May 31, 1996, A3; Monday, June 3, 1996, A5; Sunday, July 3, 1994, Y3.

6. One exception is the keynote speech by sociologist Joan Acker at the conference on "Gender, Work and Globalization", University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, Manchester School of Management, Manchester, England, January 9-10, 1998.

7 In a related way, during the long seventeenth century, Andre Gunder Frank writes that capitalists in Chile had more opportunities to accumulate when metropolis-satellite bonds were weakened. See Andre Gunder Frank, Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin American: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil, p.33.

8. Some feminist scholars have noted how women's politics develops in various work contexts. See eds., Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter, Dignity and Daily Bread: New Forms of Economic Organizing Among Poor Women in the Third World and the First; eds., Eileen Boris and Elisabeth Prugl, Homeworkers in Global Perspective: Invisible No More (New York and London: Routledge, 1996); ed., Ann Leonard, Seeds 2: Supporting Women's Work Around the World (N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1995).

9. Here I draw on the research of the Fernand Braudel Center's Households Research Group (1977-1984).

10. This formulation of the labor's householding continuum grew out of a body of research conducted at the Fernand Braudel Center in Binghamton, New York. The idea of labor's continuum is introduced in an article by Terence K. Hopkins, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Working Group Members, "Patterns of the Development of the Modern World-System", which was published in Review. The work of the Households Research Group of the Fernand Braudel Center is published in these books: Joan Smith, Immanuel Wallerstein and Hans-Dieter Evers, eds., Households and the World-Economy and Joan Smith and Immanuel Wallerstein, eds., Creating and Transforming Households: The Constraints of the World-Economy.

11. For example, there has been strong resistance to "welfare reform" and efforts to reduce national support for mothers. Although this largely women-centered movement has had cyclical surges, in both the United States and England there are strong women's movements directed against state reductions. Many changes in U.S. policy and state legislative policies have been implemented in recent years. And women's protests about the decline in state support continue emerging at the grassroots level.

[12.](#) See eds., Rae Lesser Blumberg et al., Engendering Wealth and Well-Being: Empowerment for Global Change and eds., Joan W. Scott, Cora Kaplan, Debra Keats, Transitions, Environments, Translations: Feminisms in International Politics.

[13.](#) Video-taped conference proceedings for the Women's Day on Food Conference can be obtained by writing the Institute on Theory and Praxis for Subsistence, Blumentr, 9, 50670 Cologne, Germany.

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