

 Open access • Journal Article • DOI:10.1057/PALGRAVE.FR.9400017

Thinking globally, acting locally: women activists' accounts — Source link

Pam Alldred

Published on: 24 Apr 2002 - Feminist Review (Palgrave Macmillan UK)

Related papers:

- [\[Feminism & Families: Critical Policies & Changing Practices\]](#)
- [Where have all the feminists gone? Searching for New Zealand's women's movement in the early 21st century](#)
- [Women's Education and Employment in Iran](#)
- [Altering Politics, Contesting Gender](#)
- [A Hidden History: Women's Activism in Ethiopia](#)

Share this paper:    

View more about this paper here: <https://typeset.io/papers/thinking-globally-acting-locally-women-activists-accounts-2yiqk3mhmy>

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: Women Activists' Accounts **Pam Alldred**

Published as a contribution to the Dialogue section of *Feminist Review's* Special issue on Globalisation, with kind permission from Palgrave. <http://www.feminist-review.com/>

The citation is:

Alldred, P. (2002) Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: Women Activists' Accounts, *Feminist Review*, 70 (Special issue on Globalisation) p149-163

Anti-globalisation activists have been thoroughly demonised in the UK national media in the past year, receiving the kind of coverage usually reserved for 'anarchists' in the tabloid press. That is, the 'mindless thugs' caricature of young white men in black 'hoodies' intent on violence. Needless to say, this type of coverage isn't often accompanied by any representation of protestors' own views. In fact, when reports of protest can focus on 'violence', actual political grievances – the issues and the need for direct action responses to them - are ignored. Even more rare is the chance to hear women's anger at the injustice of global capitalism and frustration at the broken promises of democracy. Contested though they are within 'the movement', at least the terms 'anti-globalisation' or 'anti-capitalism' say something about what is being protested against.

In the lead up to May Day 2001, protesters were vilified by the mainstream media as 'evil scum', a dangerous 'terrorist' threat bringing chaos and rioting to the streets of London, justifying tens of 1000s of police on duty and the 'army on stand-by'. This hype did more to publicise the idea of a May Day Monopoly (anti-privatisation) game on the actual streets of London than its 'inventors' could have done, and achieved the boarding up of much of Oxford Street for a day (resulting in 'lost sales' which were totalled up in the 'damage' reported), but made violence almost inevitable in the context of aggressive over-policing and the now familiar abuse of police powers to detain people in order to search for dangerous weapons by holding them in a police cordon for hours whilst 'intelligence' is gathered. But it is this vilification of protestors that makes possible the kind of state violence we saw in Genoa in July 2001. Protesters sleeping in a social centre could be perceived as so Other by the Italian police that they brutally beat them, threatened to rape women with batons, peed and spat on them and forced responses to their fascist rhetoric.

The big international protests that grab the media's attention represent a massive mobilisation of people angry at the global economic and social order, disillusioned in the democratic process and at governments bowing to corporate pressure. But they are sometimes assumed to *be* the movement, rather than just one expression of it, and often a geographically mobile, relatively privileged segment. Many activists in the North take their inspiration from struggles and mobilisations of ordinary people in the South, and are at pains to demonstrate how issues such as the privatisation of public services, the erosion of workers' rights and increasing inequality amongst people of the North and poverty, hunger, poor health, sweatshop employment conditions,

environmental contamination and the denial of land-rights or corporate claims over natural resources are opposite side of the same coin. It's essential to make these links apparent to pre-empt parochial or nationalist responses that fail to see how competition damages those on both sides.

Activism is only the tip of the ice-berg of a global movement, but across the world, opposition to injustice, ecological destruction and poverty is being criminalized. Radical dissenters in the UK have already been deemed terrorists under legislation passed in 2000. Even liberal commentators are alarmed, but this move flows with chilling logic from a communitarian urge for shared values, and Tony Blair's assertion of particular views as those the nation shares. The Terrorism Act 2000 redefines terrorism to include 'actions designed to influence a government', for the 'purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause' and includes damage to property or interference with an electronic system. In self-righteous condemnation of protesters, the mainstream press then neglects to distinguish morally between damage to property and violence against a person. A current campaign by the UK socialist lawyers organisation asks: 'How can fax blockades, uprooting of GM crops, protest against refugee detention centres, protest against globalisation, debt and oppressive regimes, a movement to make possible 'another world' all be terrorists? In early 2001, an action against the Act, by London Reclaim the Streets (RTS) adorned London statues of Nelson Mandela and Emmeline Pankhurst with a plaque labelling them 'Terrorist' and asked who were the real terrorists: governments complicit in the threat to us all, who put the profits of the oil industry before the reality of climate change and the interests of the biotech industry before environmental safety, or those who uproot GM crops to remove the risk?

Several women activists who were unable to contribute to this piece in the end were going to describe women activists' imprisonment for 'criminal damage' to fighter planes and other tools of genocide, to highlight the moral 'bankruptcy' of a system that fails to distinguish the 'criminality' of disabling a machine from the criminality of bombing raids; of allowing agribusiness to hold hostage the environment by releasing GM crops before they are proven safe, or the 'terrorism' of political protest using NVDA from the abuse of state power to assert ideological meanings, yet deem 'terrorist' attempts to counter these meanings. Another was going to contrast Western leaders' laws to protect the free movement of capital across the globe in search of greater profits, with the increasing criminalisation of people's migration as a result of poverty exacerbated by international trading laws that protect the interest of rich nations, wars caused by imperialist foreign interventions, or displacement by environmental disasters resulting from unregulated industrialisation. But these concerns are now horrifyingly centre-stage, confirming what we already knew: that 'you can't be a terrorist if you've got an air-force'.

As George W Bush and Tony Blair justify a war on Afghanistan in the name of defending a glorified Western democracy against the terrorist threat we see the horrifying consequences of the imperialist belief in the superiority of Western culture that Berlusconi expressed, and people so 'other' to and threatening of 'our civilisation' that 'we' cannot hear their complaints. In the

self-righteous conviction of George Bush, his rhetorical use of 'democracy' and 'freedom' ring hollow, not least given the insult to the word that his own election was and his privileging of oil industry interests (now, at Kyoto, and in Alaska). And as Tony Blair defends his actions on the international stage, he presumes to speak for the British people and of the unassailable values of 'civilisation'. But there is not a consensus in the UK about the values of 'civilisation'. This is the 'democracy' that passes the Terrorism Act, and promotes similar EC ruling defining terrorism as 'urban violence' by people with the aim of 'seriously altering the political, economic or social structures'. Nor is there contentment about how democracy operates and this is why there is a direct action movement. And how 'civilised' did the Italian police behave in Genoa? Neither is there a consensus about the war here, (nor even is there in the US). The reporting of the war and on opposition to it says even more about the corporate media than did the accounts of May Day: where organisers estimate 100 thousand people joined the London march to express their opposition to the war, the media counts 15 thousand, and when on 13th October 2001, people in 100 different countries demonstrated against the war on Afghanistan, there was barely a whisper in the UK national press.

The big demonstrations and international protests are just the tip of the iceberg of anger at the injustice of the global economic order, and even for activists who chose to go on them, they are often just one expression of their politics (and many activists do prefer more targeted interventions or focus more on sustaining a counter-culture and developing positive alternatives). Against the weight of the media hype only a few critical voices get heard (and many prefer not to engage with the mainstream press anyway) which leaves 'media tarts' sounding like figureheads of the movement. So here are the voices of a few women whose activism I respect greatly. Their accounts don't represent all of their politics or activities but in contrast to popular images give some first person perspectives on current activism, and the political and personal perspectives that can inform it.

The invitation to contribute framed them as 'anti-globalisation activists' and for some the distinction between anti-capitalism and anti-globalisation is significant, although in general, they chose to focus less on theoretical distinctions and identifications, and more on what they do. Perhaps the desire to make theoretical links and distinctions stems from an academic agenda, rather than an activist one. As friends and co-activists linked through aspects of a London-based activist scene, we share some social characteristics, many are fulltime activists and some work through different kinds of campaigns and organisations. All are based in the UK, though not all are British, first-language English or white, some choose pseudonyms.

Six accounts cannot convey the range of perspectives among activists in this small corner of the movement, let alone women's resistance more broadly. But they do offer some illustrations of the connections that individual women draw between the politics that inform their activism and their everyday lives and local environments. They demonstrate how material practices and symbolic acts are sometimes linked in cultures of resistance. The first two accounts highlight the immediacy of activism for women, both in terms of its

urgency and its connection to everyday lives through food and emotional well-being. The first contrasts the global reach of the biotech industry with resistance rooted in the local and respecting the particular. The second emphasises the importance of emotional support and self-care as values too easily trampled in the rat-race, and as essential for making activism itself sustainable. Both describe the pleasure of developing non-hierarchical ways of working with other women.

Joyce

They say that the revolution must start in the kitchen, and for me, it did. I was a waitress, and then a cook for about 16 years. I love everything about food - colours, smells, flavours, textures, preparing, eating and sharing it - I love its histories, myths, etiquettes, cultures - alimentary alchemy. It is the very stuff of life, a globally common experience and the basis for our relationships as social beings. At least it should be.

In the autumn of 1997, the first shipment of genetically engineered soy from the USA was imported into Britain. I clearly remember reading an article in a newspaper magazine about genetic engineering, and thinking after the first paragraph how exciting it sounded. Half way through the article, there was a knot in my stomach and I felt sick, because this didn't just threaten the ingredients I loved, it threatened life on earth.

I realised that no matter how wonderful any 'famous' NGO was, it was no longer acceptable for me to let them save the world on my behalf. So from passive to active... I've been working on the genetics issue ever since, and it's been a steep learning curve. I work with a brilliant bunch of people, in an office that supports grassroots campaigners. We all work under the banner of the Genetic Engineering Network, which is an amazing and diverse collection of individuals and groups all over the UK, and increasingly, all around the world, resisting the imposition of genetic engineering, and ultimately of corporate control over our lives and the world we live in.

I find it no coincidence, that not only has the campaign been one of the most inspiring and truly common causes in the environmental movement, but it also has the best gender balance. There are so many ordinary women doing amazing things. The diversity of the campaign, the willingness to listen, share, and to decide things by consensus owe a lot to the way that women work best. The woman in Dorset, England, who has tirelessly written letters and produced leaflets for as long as I have known her, the grandmother in Kenya, who feeds 13 of her family on 2 acres of land with local seed, after having rejected the chemical cocktail promoted by the multinationals, the mother in Andhra Pradesh, India, who grows 85 distinct local varieties of crops on her 5 acres, to share with neighbouring farmers, the woman that physically stopped a tractor sowing GE seed in Scotland, with her daughter on her shoulders, the cartoonist, the bannermaker, the women that pull up GE crops. None of them would thank me for telling you their names, none of them are (thankfully) the only ones doing what they do, but all of them gloriously unique. That's not to say there aren't amazing men working with us too, there are, but the key phrase is 'with us'.

Undoubtedly, the state of the world has become so polarised, and so desperate, that the movements resisting the dominant paradigm of trade, and the suffocating concentration of power in the hands of a few are drawing more people into them. For some, this means replacing one system with another, a 'blueprint for change', and as the corporate media insists on lumping us all into convenient boxes, we are

increasingly being represented by the learned opinions of 'authorities', which really means other political parties with an axe to grind, authors whose publishers want to sell more books, or 'stars' from the cult of the media. But there is no one solution, no 'onesizefitsall', no rigid recipe or cure all - that's the whole point. This alternative evangelism stems from the same arrogance as the system that controls us now - it may look simple on paper, but authoritarian hierarchies will no more lead us to our future vision than trade liberalisation will see women paid wages for housework. I rarely feel emboldened or empowered by experts, I usually feel inadequate. I get my inspiration from the dynamism and energy, the creativity, compassion and resilience of ordinary people. Change comes from listening, adapting ideas, seeking understanding and common ground, recognising and reconciling our differences and diversity.

There is a wind of change blowing, and it's coming from the South. The South is the disenfranchised, the unheard, the poor. A vast majority of the people who could be thus described are women, wherever they live.

In any war, throughout history, attacking the food supply of the enemy has been an obvious target. In 2001, Palestinian olive groves are being cut down, and fields trashed by the Israeli army. Campesinos in Colombia are having their plots indiscriminately sprayed by aeroplanes loaded with pesticides, their crops are dying and their children exposed to chemical burns - there is no particular reason for choosing these examples; there are many more. It is the nature of overt war, and control. Yet there is an implicit war being waged, that has been going on for the last 50+ years. It is the pre-emptive strike, to ensure there will be no choice, no alternative, no resistance. Women, especially in the North, hardly noticed when common land was disappeared into private hands, when choices at the shops became restricted to 4 types of fizzy drinks and 2 types of tomatoes, in one of 4 or 5 supermarket chains. Food autonomy was replaced by convenience, and farmers were 'persuaded' by market forces to stop saving seed, and were instructed by agro-experts to grow food to feed processing factories not people. The chemical facilities that manufactured bombs and weapons of war were converted to produce fertilisers and pesticides. Genetic engineering is the latest instalment in this catalogue of control. This is still largely to happen in the global South, the last market for expansionism. 80% of the world's seed is still farm saved, and 60% of the world's agriculturists are women.

Meanwhile, the assault continues. Transnational corporations have quietly acquired patents on the genes responsible for breast cancer, common food staples, traditional medicines. Legal mechanisms designed to protect industrial invention have been applied to the natural world, our global commons, the living earth is being poisoned and women stand and weep as they watch their children fall ill, of cancers and other diseases of industrialisation.

I know that these are things that will consume the rest of my life, on a daily basis - yet I don't want to spend my life just fighting. There can be no environmental justice without social equity, and yet at least 50% of the world's finest minds and bravest spirits have never been invited to contribute towards the solutions. That's you and me, girlfriend, it's what gets me out of bed every morning.... so let's go out and plant some seeds (of resistance).

To find out more about the genetic engineering network, visit www.geneticsaction.org.uk

Since the international protest against IMF-World Bank meeting in Prague in September 2000, the strategy of 'tactical frivolity' has been visible at UK and international events in the shape of a group of women (and usually a few men) dancing at police lines wearing flamboyant, home-made carnivalesque dancer costumes, colour-coordinated for an event, often pink and silver. It displays defiance, deep irreverence and throws aggressive policing into sharp relief.

A woman who runs with the wolves

I started my life in NVDA living in trees and defending them during evictions, lying in the road to stop the live export of young animals or generally the rape and decimation of the beautiful English countryside. My activism was all local, but archetypal. The image of a diverse group of people surrounding a grand old sweet chestnut tree on a town common, resisting strongly, defiantly, yet peacefully, spoke powerfully to me of the many ordinary people who are slowly coming to terms with the limitations of our governments. NVDA is basically like grabbing a small child away from the path of a speeding lorry.

Recently my activism has been about finding creativeness and beauty in resistance. I went to the international action in Prague with 30 other women dressed in huge 'showgirl' fantails. We danced with a samba band - cheeky and mischievous, but not aggressive. At one point we were singing to the cops and I waved a pink feather duster at one of them, which he proceeded to smash out of my hand with his baton! Many women understand this image without analysis. Surrealism is important as a critique of the lack of sanity apparent in, for instance, public transport policies, or the irony of police anti-gun campaigns while guns remain legal because of a few violent hunting enthusiasts and are used in the repression of protestors. There are many ways of using art in the struggle: adding printed 'government health warnings' to car adverts is a favourite. I helped put on a month-long art exhibition in a squatted venue at which we celebrated offering people free, interactive entertainment, breaking down the artist/consumer roles that are the death of the spirit of creation.

I resent being called an anarchist. I am a totally normal young woman who wants to lead a useful life. I'm a former waitress who became a worker with the homeless. I loved my job. I was good at it because I care about people. I've been forced into activism as the point of no return for the natural world draws near. I don't particularly relate to the term anti-globalisation. To me, it's obviously just another, particularly damaging, arm of capitalism. In these big protests, I find it perplexing to march alongside CAFOD calling for an end to Third World debt. These people's leader bans contraception, and condones the devastating actions of missionaries! [...] The phrase 'anti-capitalist protester' is useful as it's direct and contains a simple truth. But what the media fails to represent is the depth of love for the natural world and the humanity that drives many of us; the sense of needless suffering, in a country that could offer so much, the comprehension of the dreadful mistakes being made by people who have far more power than they can handle, sometimes I think politicians, town planners, marketing exec.s, fashion designers, factory farmers... could be genuinely ignorant of the misery and destruction they are helping produce.

You don't need to be poor for long to feel the effects of globalized business. Contrast the Italian café, where you chat and eat in a relaxed, authentic setting amongst people who know you, with the multinational fast food experience of false smiles in a sterile, characterless environment where you're just another shifted unit. I've had a dramatic change in my quality of life since I became proud to be poor - a relief from the struggle to appear 'wealthy'. I now have endless discussions with friends about

personal development and how to have more loving relationships, instead of how much we weigh and what to wear.

I believe all my politics relate to feminism as, to be a woman who refuses the victim role is an action 24/7. I have had amazing experiences doing women-only NVDA. Twenty of us stopped a London bus and painted it bright pink in protest at the owner of the large bus/coach company funding a homophobic pro-'Section 28' campaign. ['Section 28' is UK legislation introduced by the Conservatives to stop local authorities 'promoting' homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship' which New Labour unsuccessfully attempted to repeal in 2000.] I've been to women activist weekends where we talk at length about feelings and emotions. I believe emotional health honesty and sustainability go hand in hand. It is vital that women have the chance to gather together exclusively sometimes for many reasons, some of which words can't describe. I know that a lot of healing has taken place in these meetings. All political people MUST leave a space in their lives for emotional validation.

The following two contributors prefer the term 'anti-capitalist' to 'anti-globalisation' despite writing from different ideological perspectives, and both highlight international meetings as ways of linking activists of the South and North. However, they describe different forms of organising: working either through formal structures of union and party, or through a network of non-hierarchical organisations. Issues of process, particularly the feasibility of consensus decision-making, often differentiate anarchists and those on the left, but both women are critical of the emergence of (unelected) figureheads for the movement.

Sue

I've always been an anti-capitalist, because I've been a revolutionary socialist for many years. I'm a member of the group Workers Power and do various kinds of political campaign work, including anti-sweat shop protests organised by a local network, and going on some of the international demonstrations. One aspect is working in trade unions and winning support for workers such as the Dudley hospital workers who fought privatization, as well as workers overseas in sweat shops. Last year I spoke at my union conference and won support for the international demonstration in Prague. That was the first national union support in Britain. This year many more unions gave support to the anti-capitalist protests, because rank and file workers like those in Dudley have seen the connections and pushed for union involvement.

The demonstrations culminating in Genoa show that there is huge opposition to the way the world works currently, but we're up against determined and well-armed opposition. If the movement is to make headway, it has to clarify its ideas and root itself in the struggles of the majority, of workers world-wide. In Europe the anti-capitalist movement has grown up rather separated from the traditional trade union movement and we have to overcome this split, changing the trade unions in the process and challenging the old bureaucracy. Young people, especially young women, will be in the front of the movement in making these changes. That's why some of my time as an activist is spent giving back-up to the youth group 'Revolution', for instance helping with fund-raising.

The movement against globalisation (which is really against the consequences of globalisation) is extremely diverse. But I don't believe this means that all the traditions are equally 'valid'. We must debate out our differences if we are to take the movement forward. For instance, many of the movement's influential figures think that capitalism can be rendered less harmful, either by local grass roots solutions or through the intervention of local or national states. People like George Monbiot or

Naomi Klein argue for reforms to provide some kind of protection against the overarching ambitions of global capital. The problem with this reform perspective is that while the profit system survives it will insist on driving everything else. An increasing number of activists conclude that we need wholesale change in which all the major corporations, banks, services etc are taken over and run by those who work and use them. That means revolution.

We can be sure that those in control will not let themselves be reformed out of existence. Police brutality against protestors in Genoa was just a taste of what the system will do when challenged. Peaceful protest has its limits. Capitalists and their state will use violence as they did against the democratically elected socialist Allende government in Chile in 1973. We need to be prepared to defend our demonstrations, our picket lines, our occupations.

The truly international breadth of the anti-capitalist movement is a huge gain. The bosses' exploitation respects no boundaries, our opposition must do the same. There's an increasing number of international trade union meetings and conferences but these tend to be run by top officials. There are though rank and file car worker activists arguing for solidarity action across boundaries and against 'national' answers which pit one set of workers against another. The anti-capitalist movement is giving a boost to the internationalist approach.

We must continue to debate the 'party question'. Many participants in the movement are suspicious or downright hostile to 'parties'. Those of us who think that democratic revolutionary parties (and an International) are vital must work hard to convince others, but work alongside those in the movement who organise in different ways. One aspect of this debate is decision making. I've found that consensus methods of anti-capitalist networks can work for clarifying ideas and agreeing on a limited range of actions. But this method has many weaknesses. There are times when a majority just has to take a decision. If I proposed the consensus method in my trade union at work, then it would seriously weaken our ability to fight back against employers' attacks. The minority who didn't want to take action - say to defend a sacked colleague - could stop or seriously delay a strike to save their job. In such a situation we have to take a majority decision quickly and everyone then has to stick to it.

In a political party this democratic process should happen at all levels - fast or slow according to the question. What we have to ensure is that people who speak or act on behalf of everyone in the organisation are democratically elected and recallable, and that every member's views can be heard and treated with respect, even where there are fierce disagreements. This is a world away from the bureaucratic style of the old Stalinist parties and it is also different from the way that 'leaders' appear in the existing anti-capitalist movement by virtue of their academic or journalistic standing.

Finally (but crucially), our movement must continue theoretical debate, trying to understand the nature of 'globalisation'. In *Workers Power*, we see 'globalisation' as a particular phase of imperialism. The world at the start of the 21st century is still dominated by international capital, by banks, huge companies and a handful of states running the world for the benefit of a tiny number of capitalists. But new developments have produced the 'globalisation' phenomenon: communication is transformed by new technologies, production shifts constantly in search of the cheapest labour, knowledge is increasingly commodified. Bosses are putting the whole world up for sale because the giant corporations are engaged in a vicious scrap for profit making opportunities. We needn't be against globalisation, but against their form of globalisation. International and local democratic planning could ensure

we use sustainable resources. Workers are pitted against each other to drive down production costs when instead, massive reductions in production costs resulting from new technology could ensure that everyone in the globe has a life free from want [...]

June

I'm involved with Reclaim the Streets (RTS), or rather, at the moment, the People's Global Action (PGA) working group within London RTS. The PGA's origins lies with two Encuentros in Mexico and Spain, where grassroots activists from all over the world came together to talk about their fight for freedom, against all forms of exploitation and specifically neo-liberal policies which are so detrimental to the lives of the majority of the world's population. Out of these Encuentros grew the idea of a more permanent grassroots network and February 1998 saw the first PGA conference in Geneva. The groups involved range from, in the North, the Italian group Ya Basta!, London Reclaim the Streets, the Russian Rainbow Keepers and the Canadian Postal Workers, to – in the South - New Zealand Maoris, Bangladeshi Garment Workers, Indian KRRS (radical farmers union), the Brazilian Movimento Sem Terra (organised landless peasants movement) and the Nigerian Ogoni people, to mention just a few. The network is a structure for communication and co-ordination of action, and a source of great inspiration in the day-to-day struggle. A PGA conference is organised on a rotational basis every two years, the first one in Geneva, the second one in Bangalore, India and the third one, in September 2001, in Cochabamba, Bolivia (with an all-women team from the UK!). Between the conferences are smaller international meetings and regional gatherings.

In March 2000 we organised the first European PGA conference in Milan with Ya Basta!, attended by 300-400 people from all over Europe. In the chaos of hundreds of people trying to have fruitful discussions across cultures and languages, real links were made within what is known as the 'anti-capitalist' movement in Europe. While most groups use some form of direct action, the tactics differ from street parties to White Overalls, from black bloc to GMO crop destruction, from IndyMedia to feminist activism. The underlying politics that unite these different groups includes being anti-systemic, anti-authoritarian and having a deep respect for the democracy in/of a diversity of approaches. There is also a shared understanding that political work needs to be locally based, while globally networked because there are global political - economic - processes at the root of the world's social and ecological problems.

Political commentators, academics and the media often use the global character of the anti-capitalist movement as some sort of proof of a contradiction in our politics, that we're the products of the phenomenon we're fighting against. They miss the point that many groups wouldn't describe their politics as 'anti-globalisation'. Firstly, the term is largely a media construction. Secondly, it's used to describe reformist demands such as a return to a stronger nation state and to a 'nicer', more local, form of capitalism. Thirdly, it's a term that the far right uses to justify nationalistic, racist politics. So I wouldn't describe the politics I'm involved with as part of the anti-globalisation movement, but rather as a day-to-day project of liberation from capitalism, which, at this particular historical moment encapsulates all systems of oppression and exploitation, both of people and the planet.

There's no separation between my political activism and feminist activism/perspective. Being a woman gives me a particular, gendered experience which feeds an urgency and anger in my activism, because oppression is a daily bodily experience. Meeting women activists from around the world is particularly inspiring, and I work towards having gender issues at the top of the agenda of the political work I'm involved with.

IndyMedia is an international network of DIY media activists getting independent reporting of local and global actions onto the web: <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/> Whilst none of the laws on terrorism manage to make this illegal, the FBI have raised a Seattle Indymedia office and used the courts to censor reporting.

The following two contributions are from women who are involved in campaigning on economic issues of pay for women's work, against military expenditure and on 'third world debt' through international networks linking women around the globe. Sara argues that the anti-globalisation movement fails to recognise women's work or the gendered dimension of debt repayment, and offers a radical critique of the reformist demands to drop the debt or reduce debt payments. Again, both show how global analyses link with local conditions and both work to develop links between women of the North and of the South.

Cari

Women do two-thirds of the world's work - we feed the world, from breastfeeding to subsistence farming, and do most of the caring work. But two-thirds of our work is unvalued and uncounted; worst of all, it is unwaged. This lack of economic and social recognition for the backbreaking and life-enhancing work that most women do, in the face of discrimination, exploitation, war, dictatorship, displacement and often grinding poverty, is a fundamental sexist injustice, devaluing all women and everything women do. It ensures that women and children remain the majority of the poor. As a single mother who has raised three children through years surviving on diminishing Income Support and typically low wages, I've seen many friends forced to work in the sex industry to feed themselves and their families.

The Global Women's Strike is called by the International Wages for Housework Campaign, and will see women and girls in over 60 countries marking International Women's Day by striking. The call to invest in caring not killing, and to pay women, not the military, is increasingly a matter of life or death. I'm outraged at the squandering of over \$880bn a year on world military budgets, when \$80bn would provide everyone's basic needs. We need a total change of priorities, so investment goes into the enrichment of every life rather than the few.

The Strike demands make visible some of the ways women everywhere are opposing globalisation: wages for all caring work, pay equity, paid maternity leave and breastfeeding breaks, abolition of Third World debt, clean water, non-polluting energy and technology, protection from all violence and persecution, and freedom of movement. These demands ensure that women's and girls' struggle to survive is not hidden behind the few women who've made it to boardrooms, legislatures, universities and international agencies. Such women show little or no interest in what we suffer, and those in parliament backed Tony Blair, when cuts to single mothers' benefits was his first act in government.

Highlights of Strike 2001 included a 'sit-down' by 500 rural and urban women co-ordinated by Kaabong Women's group, Uganda; in Chiapas, Mexico women calling for recognition of women's work, supported by men; in India, a march of 4,000, organised by Chhattisgarh Women's Organisation; in Peru, various activities co-ordinated by The Women's Domestic Workers' Centre, and a radio broadcast by Indigenous Aymara and Quechua women; and in London, a lively crowd, including pensioners, young anarchists, refugees, 'Dykes on Strike', and Soho sex workers marched to Parliament.

Translation has been essential to making the Strike truly global, with materials in 30 languages, and a bi-lingual English/Spanish website. Volunteers everywhere helped:

many translators are immigrants, refugees or asylum seekers, which highlights how important immigrant communities are to our movements. A priority is women in towns and cities sharing resources with women in rural areas and villages. Among the most active and innovative in the Strike are women carrying babies on their backs, communicating by word of mouth without access to email, phones, or even transport or running water.

The Global Women's Strike calls for women everywhere to join us to 'Stop the World and Change It' on 8 March, 2002. Payday, a network of men, is co-ordinating men's support. To find out more or contact International Wages for Housework Campaign visit <http://womenstrike8m.server101.com>, or email: Womenstrike8m@server101.com or write to Crossroads Women's Centre, 230A Kentish Town Road, London NW6 5QX. UK. Tel: [UK code]207 482 2496, Fax: [0]207 209 4761.

Sara

I grew up in the US, the richest countries in the world, yet saw my grandmother forced to supplement her meagre income as a domestic worker by farming. Others in my family escaped poverty by joining the military. While welfare benefits were cut, mothers and grandmothers like mine struggled to raise children, only to see them used as cannon fodder for the military. Everywhere Black, Native American and immigrant women worked hard, including fighting discrimination. Later many movements began coming together, with renewed calls for reparations for slavery, but women's experience was invisible.

In the 1980s I met Black Women for Wages for Housework, a network of women of colour - African, Asian, Caribbean, Indigenous/Native American, Latina – focussing on ending women's overwork. We came together as housewives and mothers, domestic workers, rural, factory, office and hospital workers, vendors, sex workers to demand recognition and compensation. Demands like 'Pay Women Not the Military' spoke to my experience, connecting grotesque military budgets with the unpaid debt of slavery and empire. Women pay the highest price for war not least because it is our children, the product of our lifetime's work, who are slaughtered. Demanding the end of military budgets is crucial to a complete change of priorities, from killing to caring, and is increasingly urgent now that Bush is aiming to use the Middle East and others for target practice. After 11 September, US military budgets swelled by \$40 billion, on top of \$500 billion already committed for 'Star Wars'.

Third World women work the hardest. In societies impoverished by debt it's women's work - growing food, collecting water and fuel - that keeps people from starvation. Few have recognised this, certainly not politicians. One exception is former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, who recognised that most debt repayment comes from the efforts of rural women who 'work harder than anyone else'. Women keep people from starvation, but the IMF and World Bank don't care if we work 20 hours a day, or if those we care for live or die. Awareness of women's work defending the world's population has been absent from anti-globalisation and other movements. Yet everywhere women spearhead campaigns: from Bolivia, Ghana, Narmada, South Africa, Turkey, Chiapas, and Afganistan, to 'welfare mothers' in Britain and the USA.

Most recently I've worked as part of the International Women of Colour for Wages for Caring Work (as the network's now called) with the 'IMF & World Bank Wanted For Fraud' campaign. This campaign differs from those such as Jubilee 2000 which ask for debt relief, ignoring the enormous debt owed to Third World communities, particularly women, for unpaid work and for lives lost. Why should the hardest working people in the world beg for debt relief? We owe nothing – they owe us. A

women's network was launched in July 2000 to bring together women's work against debt and globalisation and to plan the Global Women's Strike 2002. As Selma James, founder of the International Wages for Housework Campaign said: 'The Strike makes clear that people not profit should be the aim of every economy. If not, we face endless exploitation, and the destruction of our world. We utterly reject this as human beings and as carers of the human race'. For more information about International Women of Colour for Wages for Care Work and the IMF & World Bank is Fraud Women's Network, contact Crossroads Women's Centre at the above address or email: crossroadswomenscentre@compuserve.com

This began as an article that aimed to describe the range of forms women's resistance to globalisation takes, emphasising diverse strategies from everyday acts, the development of practical alternative resources, organising in women's groups or trades unions, mass demonstrations and symbolic defiance. Recognising that it is the women of the South, in particular, who bear the brunt of the impact of neo-liberal 'free market' economic policies, it hoped to be sensitive to the struggles for survival that might frame the urgency of resistance amongst women of the South, and make links with some of the strategies of activist women in the more privileged North. Certainly the theme of local, international or global forms of resistance emerges in any of these women's accounts, but the difficulty of understanding the perspectives of women in the majority world when their voices were not heard directly, replicated global North-South power relations by the colonising act of representation of their 'voices' by my own.

How do we hear the voices of women at the very sharp end of neo-liberal policies and strengthen our links with them? Do international links make us a global movement, or is the idea that we are one in spite of our differences of privilege a Western construct to unify and comfort? Contributors agree the importance of making connections between people in the North and South, as well as of making the connections in the arguments about opposing privatization here and corporate leaching and sweatshop employment there, but they differ on whether they see the aim as building an international movement or a network to strengthen existing smaller forces of resistance, where diversity is itself a strength. It relates to whether we look to one revolution or to a myriad littler revolutions, but activists are forming coalitions to oppose the neo-liberal economic order across ideological differences - regardless of whether 'global capitalism' or 'corporate globalisation' is our preferred term, and the strength of alliances might relate more to differences along the reform/revolution dimension than of ideology, certainly when the focus is on action. It might well be that the sense of a unified movement dissolves when we start to discuss/create positive alternatives, as some commentators predict, but it might also be precisely then that diversity will be a strength, as local solutions are needed within a global perspective. For activists, the priority is to get on and do something now, not to the exclusion of analysis, but even profound differences mustn't stop us from acting now against the things we don't like. In the face of hostile and reactionary voices that gleefully point out the significance of tools of globalisation, such as the internet, in the mobilization of opposition to it, or the superficial observations of protestors wearing sweatshop brands, we must assert that we needn't have

all the answers before we identify the problems, as a banner at London's 2001 May Day protests said: 'Overthrow Capitalism and Replace it with Something Nicer'.

Meanwhile, what are we doing? Global forums where activists from the North do get to hear directly about struggles in the South (and no doubt simple attributions to this binary are defied) include the People's Global Action, the Global Women's Strike and International Women of Colour for Wages for Care Work networks. At the time of writing, one contributor is in Bolivia at an international PGA conference, gathering testimonies of women from around the globe (contactable afterwards for speaking/slide-shows via pgabolivia@yahoo.co.uk); another is travelling to a European food 'safety' meeting to lobby for sustainable agriculture and to work in soup kitchens; and many of us are frantically emailing people we know around the globe in the hope that strengthening personal links can go some way to interrupting the construction of 'the West' against its Others, the 'civilised' world against the Islamic world.

With thanks to each of the contributors, respect to women resisting elsewhere, apologies to Helen Ward (whom I originally approached to write this as a joint piece) and thanks to the FR Editorial Collective for ongoing dialogue about women's activism.