

Extractivism, Resistance, Alternatives

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This issue of *Feminist Africa* marks the successful transition of the journal from its birthplace, the African Gender Institute at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, across the continent to the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Accra. After a three-year gap, *Feminist Africa* has emerged with a new institutional host, a new editorial structure and a new website. Many people have been involved in ensuring that this transition takes place smoothly. This issue¹ is on the theme of **Extractivism, Resistance, Alternatives**.

Extractivism refers to the longstanding colonial and imperialist phenomenon of accumulating wealth by extracting a wide range of natural resources from countries colonised in Africa, Asia and the Americas, and exporting this wealth to the metropolises. The natural resources involved are oil, gas and minerals, as well as the resources extracted from agriculture, seeds, land and water. This is the process at the heart of so-called “development”, but the process leaves former colonised countries underdeveloped and impoverished. Affected communities face the violence of having their land and resources seized from them, the unravelling of social bonds, and the destruction of ecosystems (Gudynas, 2010; Acosta, 2011; Ye *et al.*, 2020). What renders extractivism a distinct process within contemporary capitalism is the shift away from accumulation through ownership and direct control over sites of production, which is the case in industrial capitalism. Instead, accumulation takes place in a global system where operational centres with control over the flows of resources and services, extract these from places of poverty, concentrating wealth elsewhere (Ye *et al.*, 2020). Extractivism and its consequences are highly gendered but its treatment in the literature is generally gender blind (WoMin, 2013, 2015). This issue presents feminist analyses of diverse manifestations of extractivism in Africa, the resistance to its consequences, and the alternatives that are being pursued.

International public and private sector players are currently exhibiting enormous predatory interest in Africa, viewing the continent as a source of vast natural resources and markets. A total of 101, mostly British, corporations that are listed on the London Stock Exchange have mining operations in 37 African countries. Together they control over \$1 trillion of Africa's most valuable resources—gold, platinum, diamonds, copper, gas, oil, and coal (Curtis, 2016). The continent's three largest commercial partners are China, the European Union and the United States, whose transactions comprise a complex mix of infrastructure projects, commercial loans and trade, as well as “free trade” agreements allowing foreign companies preferential access to African markets (Schneidman and Weigert, 2018). African markets have also become increasingly important for Russia since the implementation of sanctions against that country in 2014. Russia is seeking to increase its access to African governments as well as African energy and mineral resources, in exchange for military support, arms, and nuclear energy (Blank, 2018). All this is happening at a time of deepening fractures and inequalities within African countries, with increasing immiseration, soaring unemployment, and the intensification of gender inequalities prevailing across most parts of the continent (African Development Bank, 2016; Seery *et al.*, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the African Feminist Reflection and Action Group²—a loose continental network of feminist scholars, activists, trade unionists, and members of political parties—has engaged in critical debates since November 2017 on the challenges arising from neoliberal “development”, the intensification of capitalism through extractivism, and the space for political engagement and feminist activism. Members share an understanding of feminism as simultaneously an intellectual and a political project of transformation in the direction of social and gender justice. At the second Feminist Idea Lab, held in Kampala from 7 to 9 May 2018, discussions drew attention to the hegemonic narratives used to justify extractivist practices (e.g. modernisation, development, and food security), the actors involved (transnational corporations, authoritarian states and their militarised “security services”) as well as the practices adopted (e.g. increasing corporatisation and land grabbing). The differing ways in which these developments have reinforced patriarchal, racist, and other societal fracturings in various African national contexts were also highlighted.

Members of the Reflection and Action Group agreed that it was essential to improve understanding of the processes of extractivism in Africa, and to document resistance and related struggles as well as alternatives. The Group's concept paper concluded that "genuine alternatives need to emerge from social movements, peoples, communities, and women specifically, based on their lived realities, developmental practices and aspirations that promote emancipatory and multidimensional change. [...] such alternatives already exist and are even practised" (Randriamaro, 2019: 17). In this issue, the feature article by Charmaine Pereira on genetically modified crops in Nigeria and the Conversation piece with Marianna Fernandes and Nzira de Deus on strengthening feminist solidarity across Brazil, Mozambique and Angola, grew directly out of these discussions.

The work of the African Feminist Reflection and Action Group has provided *Feminist Africa* with the opportunity to address this pressing concern and circulate the feminist perspectives emanating from different sites of extractivism. The first feature article provides a critical feminist analysis of the contextual dimensions of extractivism in Africa. Charmaine Pereira and Dzodzi Tsikata draw attention to the wider political economy within which extractivism operates, outlining ways in which the pre-eminence of financial processes has exacerbated extractivism in agriculture as well as in the energy sectors. The article addresses four main themes: the meanings and manifestations of extractivism, the key players involved, responses and resistance, and alternatives to extractivism.

Both Dzifa Torvikey and Charmaine Pereira address questions pertaining to agriculture in their feature articles. Extractivism in industrial agriculture and its expansion in Ghana is the focus of Torvikey's article and her analysis of the tensions that industrial cassava production generates in relation to women's household production of the crop. The control of household resources that are key in agrarian livelihoods, such as land and labour (Tsikata, 2009), becomes more complicated in the context of extractivism, with gender and class inequalities being sharpened in such situations. Pereira addresses the recent introduction of genetically modified (GM) food crops in Nigeria, with a focus on cowpea, a crop grown predominantly by poor women and men. This new face of extractivism in Nigeria is manifesting in the context of the federal government's drive to reduce the country's dependence on oil by strengthening its policy emphasis on agriculture. Meanwhile, there are increasing pressures on land as well as proliferating conflicts in rural areas as a

result of banditry, which the introduction of a technical “fix” such as GM crops cannot resolve.

Teresa Cunha and Isabel Casimiro’s feature article examines the political economy of Mozambique, the surrounding conflicts, and the impacts on women’s lives. The natural resources extracted cover the full spectrum—minerals and energy resources, aluminium, fishing, forestry, and industrial agriculture. Most of these come from northern provinces, including Cabo Delgado, where systematic violence, armed conflict and insurgent activities have been ongoing for the last six years.

Regarding the diverse actors involved in extractive processes, Pereira’s feature illuminates the variegated corporate, governmental, and scientific agencies involved in promoting GM crops, from which they accrue vast profits. Contestations surrounding the conduct and interpretation of science mark the intellectual politics of this regime. Resistance to GM crops in the country has seen activists organising on multiple fronts, including rural communities and the federal legislature. While the focus has been on making connections between food sovereignty and farmers’ livelihood security, there is a major lacuna concerning the social relations of production and their gendered dimensions.

Torvikey explores how women mobilised to resist the company producing the industrial cassava, the strategies they adopted, and the resulting outcomes. Her examination of women’s different modes of resistance points to differentiated responses in women’s struggles to regain control of their traditional systems of production. Yet women were united in their opposition to a production system that exploited their labour and prioritised corporate profit whilst jeopardising women’s livelihoods.

The extreme repression, political harassment and deepening militarisation in northern Mozambican provinces created serious methodological challenges for Teresa Cunha and Isabel Casimiro’s study. Despite this, the authors are able to highlight the multi-layered challenges faced by the impoverished women peasants to whom they spoke. They found women determined to organise, both to resist the divisive strategies of government and corporations, and to create new possibilities for the future.

What would it take to move from such extremely exploitative economies to feminist alternatives? Donna Andrews’ *Standpoint* examines this question, pointing to the multiple converging crises—economic, social, and ecological—in which

extractivism is embedded. Andrews argues that alternatives are required on all the fronts on which feminists face challenges, from trade to technology and more. The violence and sexual exploitation surrounding the extractive industry are particularly egregious; feminists are exposing and challenging the sexism and misogyny on which such violations are predicated. Andrews highlights the tensions that arise over the denial in numerous quarters—by NGOs, state agencies, corporations and progressive activists—that the social and ecological costs of extractivism are borne by women through their unremunerated social reproduction work and cheap labour. Seeking alternative relationships among peoples and the planet is essential when faced with the social and ecological destruction that extractivism brings in its wake. Andrews concludes that the creation of life-affirming economies will lie at the heart of generating alternatives.

Feminist practice that aims to resist extractivism as well as generate solidarity in the struggle for alternatives is a critical arena for fusing knowledge and activism. The complexities of such efforts form the focus of our two Profiles and the Conversation. Margaret Mapondera and Samantha Hargreaves' profile of the feminist network WoMin outlines its journey from a research initiative on the destructive impacts of extractive industries on women, to the formation of an Africa-wide ecofeminist alliance. Abiodun Baiyewu discusses Global Rights, a human rights NGO in Nigeria which engages with rural communities where extractive activities are ongoing and works on natural resource governance across the country from a feminist perspective. Marianna Fernandes and Nzira de Deus, in conversation with Charmaine Pereira, discuss their collaborative efforts in transcontinental feminist organising and solidarity. Feminists from Brazil, Mozambique and Angola organised a week-long workshop to bring together rural women from these three Portuguese-speaking countries, who are actively engaged in resistance to transnational corporations and extractivist enterprises. The organisers came from the following groups and networks: *Fórum Mulher* (Women's Forum), World March of Women, *MovFemme* (*Movimento das jovens feministas de Moçambique* - Young feminists' movement of Mozambique), *Ondjango Feminista* (Feminist Gathering) and WLSA (Women and Law Southern Africa).

We pay tribute to the Nigerian feminist theorist, literary critic, and poet, 'Molara Ogundipe, who died on 18 June 2019. Adedoyin Aguru recalls her time as a student with Ogundipe, celebrating the latter's intellectual and social

participation in university life, particularly her engagement with students in the Faculty of Arts. One of Ogundipe's major contributions is her theory of STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa). Ogundipe stresses the necessity of understanding the complex and paradoxical construction of African women in society, and was one of the first Nigerian Marxist-feminists at the University of Ibadan in the 1970s. She observed that, "All over Africa, African feminists are theorising our feminisms and we will do well to listen to them" (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994: 228). Desiree Lewis' FA interview 'In Conversation with Ogundipe' (Lewis and Ogundipe, 2002) draws attention to the multiple sources of radicalism influencing Ogundipe's politics, the significance of her work on identity, culture and language, as well as the challenges she faced as a leftist feminist in Nigeria.

As the year 2019 gave way to 2020, an initial outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan, China led to a new pandemic being unleashed upon the world. For the African continent, COVID-19 is yet one more crisis to add to the existing string of disasters—"climate heating, environmental degradation, unemployment and rising poverty, land grabs and widespread hunger, increasing violence, specifically violence against women, and civil conflicts in many countries" (WoMin, 2020). Responses to COVID-19 from governments across the world have been unprecedented in some respects, most of them involving more or less extensive restrictions of movement and lockdowns of one kind or another. Tanzania—with virtually no restrictions but affected by border closures and South Africa—with very extensive lockdown provisions—are at two ends of the spectrum, with many other countries along the continuum.

Working class and peasant women are particularly burdened by these crises, given their responsibilities as "primary household food producers, caregivers and harvesters of water, energy and other basic goods needed for the reproduction of life and the well-being of people" (WoMin, *ibid.*). Women are more likely to experience violence at the hands of their intimate partners in the context of intense social and economic stress arising from the pandemic, made worse by lockdowns (Britwum, 2020). The informal economy, of which women comprise the majority, has been badly hit; lockdowns prevent traders and vendors from earning money on a daily basis, without which they are unable to put food on the table. Migrant women, internally displaced women in camps, refugees and prisoners will also be seriously affected by the pandemic and its associated responses.

Feminists have argued that COVID-19, like other international health emergencies, will exacerbate existing inequalities on the basis of age, class, gender, disability and income (Williams *et al.*, 2020). It is women who carry out the bulk of unremunerated care work and the pandemic will add sharply to this load, thus heightening “the risk of a crisis of social reproduction” (WoMin, 2020; Britwum, 2020). The global women informal workers’ network, WIEGO, points out that COVID-19 has exposed the economic injustice and inequality that persists around the world: “most of those who provide essential goods and services do not enjoy essential rights” (Chen, 2020). The frontline workers who provide essential goods and services, many of whom are informal workers, comprise a total of two billion workers, an estimated 61% of all workers globally (Chen, *ibid.*).

There are connections between the emergence of SARS-CoV-2³, the virus causing the COVID-19 disease, and extractivist activities. The scientific consensus is that COVID-19 is caused by a zoonotic virus, i.e. one that jumped from an animal to humans. “As people move further into the territories of wild animals to clear forests, raise livestock, hunt and extract resources, we are increasingly exposed to the pathogens that normally never leave these places and the bodies they inhabit” (Shield, 2020). Urban expansion, industrial agriculture and deforestation are among the activities that bring people into ever-closer contact with animal-borne pathogens. “When we mine, drill, bulldoze and overdevelop, when we traffic in wild animals and invade intact habitat, when we make intimate contact with birds, bats, primates, rodents and more, we run an intensifying risk of contracting one of the estimated 1.6 million unknown viruses that reside in the bodies of other species” (Tobias and D’Angelo, 2020). The industrialisation of animal agriculture has rendered livestock more susceptible to pathogens (Ajl, 2020). Clearly, extractivist activities have contributed to the emergence of COVID-19, while the pandemic itself has exposed the hierarchies and blatant inequalities of the neoliberal order, inequalities which governments have been willing to ignore or treat as “normal” for far too long.

It is not surprising, therefore, that COVID-19 has compelled simultaneously material and existential questions to circulate in the public domain: What is “essential” to live a decent life? What is required to promote the wellbeing of all, and how can such goals be made central to government policy? Connections and disconnections, intimacy and distance between home and place of work in

urban as well as rural spaces are now difficult to ignore. Bodies, labour alienation, livelihoods, and land, their dynamic relations to one another – and to production and distribution – are increasingly receiving attention. As WoMin argues, “[W]e need radical transformations to guarantee a life for all beings on the planet” (WoMin, 2020). Universal health care that not only provides a public service but also entails people-oriented production of medicines and medical technology is one arm of such restructuring (Valiani, 2020). Another is an alternative farming system which would encompass food sovereignty and polycultures (as opposed to the monocultures central to agroindustry) as well as a more humane approach to livestock. Not only would this provide healthier food, but it would also result in healthier animals that are more resilient to pathogens. The interconnections among farming, health, and labour surface clearly here (Ajl, 2020).

African feminists have displayed vigilance and creativity in the discussions around responses to COVID-19, creating and taking up numerous opportunities to organise webinars and signature campaigns and to issue statements. One such initiative reveals the agenda-setting nature of their engagements. In July 2020, over 340 African feminists and feminist organisations signed an open letter to Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Donald Kaberuka, Tidjane Thiam, Trevor Manuel and Benkhalfa Abderrahmane – the Special Envoys mandated by the African Union to mobilise international support to address the coronavirus pandemic in Africa. The letter set out the nature of the COVID-19 crisis and its far-reaching implications and possibilities for rethinking Africa’s economies and societies (African Feminism, 2020). As the African Feminist post-COVID-19 Economic Recovery Statement argues,

COVID-19 has provided us with an opportunity to reimagine African political economies. This moment requires a pan-African response that creates an enabling environment for people and movement-led economic work, including but not limited to cooperative and solidarity economics, to be given the support and space to flourish. COVID-19 needs to be a turn-around point from orthodox laissez-faire models and overly financialised states. This crisis is an opportunity to dislodge structural inequality and re-frame the political economy which contributed to this tipping point.

The 12 recommendations in the Statement above are wide-ranging and fundamental. They include a call for a more proactive and reformed state which prioritises policy interventions that reinforce the rights of those most marginalised by current policies and thus more heavily affected by the impacts of COVID-19. These include women, and all who experience overlapping axes of structural marginalisation, on the basis of class, disability, HIV status, sexual orientation and gender identity. Other demands are the reinforcement of localised food supply chains; the prioritisation of conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for the benefit of communities who are custodians of the resources and whose livelihoods are directly dependent on natural resources; and policy choices which recognise the centrality of the informal economy and the economic, social, political and cultural value of the care economy, and which offer support measures for a resilient care sector that does not rely on the exploitation of women in the home and in the workplace. There are also recommendations for a fundamental reform of social policy and the building of state capacity to deliver public goods and vital services to the citizenry without discrimination. Of the rest of the world, the Statement demands debt cancellation; foreign direct investment which does not insist on, and is not given, tax breaks and privileges that undermine local industry; and the sustainable use of Africa's natural resources in ways that protect the earth and local communities (African Feminism, *ibid.*).

These recommendations constitute an African feminist manifesto for the construction of a just, equitable and sustainable Africa and a rejection of extractivism; they should be the basis of conversations that engage all Africans. Fundamental changes of the kind recommended in this and other analyses, along with actions to guarantee the immediate security and interests of the African women likely to be hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, demand a restructuring of state-society relations in ways that “expand the role of the state and reorient its relations with people, thus taking us in the direction of the larger macro-revolutions needed” (WoMin, 2020). *Feminist Africa* hopes in future issues to accompany these struggles by highlighting, extending, and deepening the emerging feminist analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic on a wide range of topics that touch the lives of women and all marginalised groups, in the best traditions of rigorous and engaged scholarship.

In autonomous struggles and in alliance with progressive groups, feminists are challenging and resisting the ideologies sustaining extractivism and its treatment of natural resources—not only oil, gas, and minerals - but also land, forests, crops, and water. Feminists have shown that extractivism relies on the extreme exploitation of women’s bodies and women’s labour in unacknowledged and destructive ways. By remaining insubordinate to injustice, feminists can draw inspiration from one another in challenging the greed and corruption inherent in corporate self-interest and the capitalist order (Govender, 2020). While envisioning alternatives, feminist theory and practice needs now, more than ever, to be attuned to the ongoing flux in complex, layered realities. In an uncertain future, and across divisions of gender, class, generation, religion, race, sexual orientation and more, feminists across Africa and beyond are imagining the world anew, placing the wellbeing and dignity of all at the heart of transformed relations among peoples and the planet. Feminist knowledge, movements and organising are critical to this vision.

Endnotes

1. This relocation and new phase are reflected in our volume designation, such that all issues hosted by the African Gender Institute (1-22) constitute Volume 1 (2002-2017). From now on, volumes will be numbered annually, beginning with the current Volume 2, Issue 1 in 2021.
2. The African Feminist Reflection and Action Group is an independent group convened by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). At the first meeting, held in Maputo between 28 and 29 November 2017, 27 women attended from 16 African countries: Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland (renamed by the King as Eswatini), and Uganda. FES convened four Feminist Idea Labs across the continent between 2017 and 2019, bringing together members of the Group and invited guests on these occasions. The Reflection and Action Group also met with and engaged local organisations at these events.
3. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2.

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covid-19-crisis-upon-crisis-in-africa-an-ecofeminist-perspective/

Ye, Jingzhong *et al.*, 2020. "The Incursions of Extractivism: Moving from Dispersed Places to Global Capitalism", *Journal of Peasant Studies* 47 (1): 155-183. Available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331260487> The incursions of extractivism moving from dispersed places to global capitalism