ESSAY

Seeds of Neo-Colonialism? Reflections on Ecological Politics in the New World Order*

By Kavita Philip

1. Introduction

This essay is a set of reflections on recent opposition to globalization; on the history of cultured nature; on the relationships among environmentalism, nationalism, traditionalism, and anti-capitalism; and on the need for scholars and activists to engage with one another through politically committed theory and praxis.

The essay makes two claims. First, I suggest that present-day environmentalism would profit from — indeed, can scarcely afford to be practiced in isolation from — a consistent engagement with history. Second, I suggest that academic and activist discourses alike should be continually evaluated in terms of their (explicit and implicit) political assumptions. To elucidate these methodological prescriptions, I offer some elements of a dialogue between historical and current political

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ecologies; and a particular case study to illustrate the need for such analyses.

If we accept the claim that a historical perspective might enrich current environmentalism, we must, further, specify what kind of historical perspective is called for. I advocate the practice of a materially grounded, political economic and historical analysis of ecology. Such an approach helps identify the local and global interests at stake, and also serves as a cautionary rein on some popular myths of the present. The environmental movement today embraces philosophies ranging from nostalgic romanticism to technocratic optimism, and history serves as a useful yardstick by which to recall previous contexts and consequences of these modes of thought.

Oil corporations, timber contractors, hunters and hikers today claim "environmentalism" as their icon. Revealing contradictions in the discourse, and rejecting simplistic claims of unity, are essential steps to addressing this seemingly bland consensus. Less obvious than corporate versus grass-roots ideological differences are the internal distinctions among progressive environmentalists. In the context of an anti-globalism movement and popular resistance to the new economic order, several sorts of political claims tend to get bundled together under the rubric of sustainable jobs, ecosystems, and biological and cultural diversity. One obvious benefit of this bundling is the coalition politics it enables, as in the "turtles and teamsters" alliance at the November, 1999, demonstrations against the WTO in Seattle. Coalition politics, however, always treads the fine line between skillful strategy and confused priorities. Alliances at marches are euphoric but momentary. If the multifarious actors do not allow their theory and practice to be critically informed and periodically re-tuned, any broad activist agenda has a tendency to slip into a compromise with the status quo. Even while striving to build broad coalitions in specific battles, it is useful on a regular basis to exercise a critical perspective. Lasting alliances and deeper victories for environmental and social justice can be won only if we create sustained engagement with one another's arguments, and assess them against our multiple, shared, political contexts.

Current debates in Indian ecopolitics, which I take up as a case study, exhibit symptoms of a lack of such political-historical analysis: we find multiple trajectories at odds with one another and glossed-over silences regarding the politics of nationalism and subalternity, globalization and new social movements. Ideologies proffered in opposition to neo-colonialist modernity collude — often unwittingly, but sometimes deliberately — with the triumphalist narrative of the new world order.

The call to historicize and politicize our understandings of environmental politics is hardly new. Fetishistic pursuits of the eternally new notwithstanding, it is not so much novelty that we need in environmentalism, as the ongoing exercise of our best critical faculties and political imaginations. Dialogues between the present and pasts of environmental politics, and between its activist and academic domains, should be regular exercises built into the everyday routines of eco-activists and scholars. Unpacking the multiple complexities and unspoken conflicts among different ways of understanding environmental politics is a political necessity rather than an academic luxury.

2. Eco-Politics and The New World Order

History helps contextualize a popular guiding myth of the present — the cultural and economic trends that go by the name of "globalization." Global political economy and environmental activism have long been intertwined. "Globalization" is part of a larger temporal and spatial manifold than is acknowledged in contemporary fables of its putatively unprecedented novelty.

Scholars of the sociology, history, and politics of the environment have, for more than two decades now, called attention to the issues that have recently sparked massive protests around the world, such as the ecological myopia of the GATT and WTO globalization agendas, or the immiseration and displacement caused by the policies of the IMF and World Bank.[1] The neo-liberal narrative of globalization chants a free market mantra that requires a continual supply of cheap raw materials and cheap labor to facilitate the smooth working of multinational corporations in interdependent circles of global commerce.

The new world order involves a complex — but not entirely novel — interlocking system of politics, economy, and culture. Since the end of the Cold War, its dominant (U.S.-influenced) narrative has concerned the expansion of a free market model of liberal democracy, and the expanding consumption of commodified "Americanized" mass culture.

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[1]See Raymond L. Bryant and Sinead Bailey, *Third World Political Ecology: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Allan Pred and Michael J. Watts, *Reworking Modernity: Capitalisms and Symbolic Discontent* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Bruce Rich, *Mortgaging the Earth: The World Bank, Environmental Impoverishment, and the Crisis of Development* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Kevin Danaher, ed., *50 Years Is Enough: The Case against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund* (Boston: South End Press, 1994).

The global economy is characterized by flexible accumulation; increased cross-border outsourcing and the prevalence of multiple, dispersed sites of economic production; increasingly rapid and wide global flows of capital, natural resources, and people; the growing trans-nationalization of corporations and the apparent de-nationalization of nation-states.[2] The global marketplace will — the technocratic proponents of this narrative claim — ensure that all humans can become subjects of the new civil society.

The optimistic narrative of the new world order, nevertheless, is belied by the facts of increasing Third World debt, worsening labor conditions, and the degradation of local ecologies and livelihoods at the hands of transnational corporations. Activists and intellectuals have recently combined direct action with a systematic critique of the neo-colonial forces which were constructed after World War II and reinvigorated in the post-Cold War period by a nexus of transnational corporations, western industrialized states, and multilateral financial institutions. Creative coalitions have emerged among different groups of actors who oppose the new world order for disparate reasons. To environmentalists, the urgent task of protecting global resources defines the primary critical perspective on the new world order; to labor activists, the protection of jobs and benefits under the new regime is paramount. Conventional "zero-sum" analyses would pit them against each other, as, for instance, in the "spotted owl versus lumberjack" debate between those who would protect endangered species and those who would protect jobs. However, the anti-globalization protests of 1999-2000 saw surprising alliances between labor and greens. One anecdote from Seattle recounts how union bureaucrats tried to keep their marchers away from the "restricted" zones in which police were attacking young eco-activists. Some rank-and-file union activists

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[2]Saskia Sassen's work on globalization complicates the standard claim that the phenomenon simply causes the weakening of nation-states and the diffusion of global uniformity. She shows that the globalized economy still depends for its functioning on the old nation-state system's regulations, law courts, and policy-making bodies. A de-nationalization of territory has been accompanied by the re-nationalization of politics, accompanied by the growth of sub- and supra-national groups which wield power within and among the nation-state's configurations. See Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents: Essays on the New Mobility of People and Money* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

pushed past their leadership, one steelworker shouting, "Get out of the way! I'm going down there to help those turtle kids!"[3]

Dismissing activists as naïve and uninformed, the technical discourses of expertise maintain that the information society is "beyond" politics. The free-marketeer prophets of the new economic order who proclaimed the End of History in 1989 now celebrate the globalization of production as an unprecedented new and progressive phenomenon, promising that free markets tow democracy and universal progress in their wake. The Information Age is seen as heralding the rise of "knowledge" to the status of a global force of production — hence the importance of owning and trading information as "intellectual property." On the other hand, indigenous and global opponents of the new economic order question the very notion of owning little bits of nature, or of individuals profiting from collectively nurtured knowledge about nature.

Is the political ownership of knowledge really so new? The activist agenda against free-market globalization might profit from an intellectual history of scientific knowledge and private property. Such a history might begin with the multi-civilizational ancient trade routes in the Indian Ocean, and the forms of cultural and commercial exchange that they created.[4] Contemporary conflicts over scientific knowledge in the South are always also conflicts over the terms of modernity. Such conflicts are bound up with negotiations over the meanings of the knowing/ possessing subject and the known/controlled "natural" object; and meanings of "development" and "underdevelopment," and notions of what it means to be a sovereign nation-state in the age of globalization. That history of knowledge-as-commodity remains to be written.[5] The argument below assumes its importance. Rather than attempting a comprehensive history, I will revisit some key moments in the modern history of nature's ownership, suggesting that a historical canvas makes evident the specific sources of power in the new order's discourse of freedom.

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[3]My thanks to Lance Newman for this report, which he picked up on one of the many internet news groups reporting on Seattle.

[4]See Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (New York: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[5]A useful introduction to the issues is Nick Rowling, *Commodities: How the World Was Taken to Market* (London: Free Association Books, 1987).

3. Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism, and Anti-Neo-Colonialism

This section begins with three scenes. In lieu of a comprehensive history, the juxtaposed scenes invite the reader to draw historical links between a number of well-known events in the history of owning nature.[6] These events help sketch, in quick outlines, the issues at the intersection of techno-sciences of nature, global political economies, and the history of property. The scenes are called, respectively: colonialism, neo-colonialism, and anti-neo-colonialism.[7]

Scene 1: Colonialism

In the 18th and 19th centuries large numbers of botanical specimens were transferred across the Atlantic to the private herbaria and public gardens of Europe; by the 19th century many of these were domesticated in tropical colonies of the French, Dutch, and British. Botanical knowledge was, in this process of exploration and collection, becoming both an intellectual and a political resource that could be deployed in the rhetoric of national, imperial, or universal human progress. Scientific knowledge served here as the rhetorical link between national self-interest and humanitarian service.

Consider, as an illustrative example, the Cinchona Story. In the 1850s, cinchona seeds and saplings were smuggled by Clements Markham, amateur geographer and employee of the East India Company, out from the Peruvian Andes, nurtured in Kew Gardens, and then

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[6]Vignettes such as these are, of course, no substitute for detailed histories. See, for instance, Jonathan S. Adams and Thomas O. McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation without Illusion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.); Richard Peet and Michael Watts, eds., *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1996); David Goodman and Michael Redclift, *From Peasant to Proletarian: Capilalist Development and Agrarian Transitions* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1982). The first "scene" is adapted from my research on the history of the Cinchona transfer; see, e.g., Kavita Philip, "Global Botanical Networks, Environmentalist Discourses, and the Political Economy of Cinchona Transplantation to British India," *Revue Francaise d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer,* Special Issue, No. 322-323, April, 1999; and Chapter 7 of the forthcoming book, Kavita Philip, *Civilising Natures* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2002).

[7]Colonialism, imperialism, and anti-imperialism would perhaps be more accurate titles; however, I am attempting here to stay close to the terms actually employed by the activist discourses around these issues.

transplanted to the Nilgiri hills of South India. Cinchona was a vital instrument of empire, for its bark was the source of the only known treatment for malaria. Markham, who was knighted after the success of his cinchona expedition, described the project in his memoirs:

> There is probably no drug which is more valuable to *man* than the febrifugal alkaloid which is extracted from the chinchona trees of South America; and fewer blessings could be conferred on *the human race* than the naturalisation of these trees in India.[8]

The use of universals such as “man” and “the human race” upon whom the blessings of cinchona shall fall, and the invocation of dangerous tropical adventures undertaken to bring these blessings to them evoke the image of the benevolent scientist toiling dangerously in the service of humanity.

Markham openly defied Peruvian and Bolivian legislation against the export of cinchona seeds, bribing and cajoling his way to the tree (which he could not locate and identify without the help of indigenous Andeans), and finally fleeing across the borders with his botanical loot. In his writings, he portrays South American governments and indigenous people as barbarous because of an alleged lack of concern for nature, while South Asian “natives” are invoked as potential beneficiaries. He suggests that local skirmishes over botanical property rights — although they violate national sovereignty of Britain’s global competitors — are fought in the name of all humanity, including the natives of colonized nations, who, although not truly able to preserve and nurture nature, are still worthy of receiving the fruits of science.

Once the initial transplantation was accomplished, however, and it became clear that quinine was being distributed widely to troops and settlers but hardly at all to the South Asian “natives,” Markham and members of the Cinchona Committee argued that the distribution of a natural commodity was the function of economics, not science; and that while science was a humanitarian enterprise, economics followed the impersonal laws of the market, and thus it could not make allowances for the inaccessibility of the natives (or localized contexts) to the

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[8]Clements Markham, *Travels in Peru and India While Superintending the Collection of Chinchona Plants and Seeds in South America, and Their Introduction into India* (London: John Murray, 1862), p. 1; emphases added.

market flows (or global laws) of quinine distribution.[9] That the resources for the production of quinine (indigenous peoples' knowledge and land) had come originally from some of these same local contexts could not count, since, in a generalized economic scheme, all contexts are by definition equivalent, and must homogeneously follow the laws of the market.

Scene 2: Neo-colonialism (consisting of 3 fragments from multiple, simultaneous scenes)

Fragment 1

In an apparent gesture of post-Rio global eco-heroism, Costa Rica sets aside from development 25 percent of its land mass, in the form of protected ecosystems. Western banks earn eco-brownie points for a spectacular implementation of the idea of debt-for-nature swaps, while the Costa Rican State sets up the Instituto Nacional de Biodiversidad (INBio) and begins to explore the meaning of Development in the age of globalization. American scientists, among them eminent conservation biologists Daniel Jansen, Edward Wilson, and Thomas Eisner, hail the advent of an epoch in which politics will serve the noble ideals of science, so that biologists may finally lead humanity on the right path to preservation, unencumbered by the messy negotiations of global geo-politics, nationalism, and local property rights. Conservation biologists, multinational pharmaceutical companies and the Costa Rican government enter into agreements to collaborate on the liberation of local biological knowledge into global networks of science and capital.

David Takacs' *The Idea of Biodiversity*[10] offers close textual analyses of the discourse of American conservation biology in Costa Rica. Takacs tracks the construction of a religiously inflected narrative in which biologists offer conservation ethics as a way to do right by our identity as ecological organisms, while transcending the politics of race and difference. The parallels with the Markham story are striking: the interests of science and nature are invoked as reasons for privileging transnational connections over local rights; once a network of capital

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[9]Colonel Campbell Walker, 1878 Report of the Cinchona Committee (mss., Tamilnadu State Archives, Chennai).
[10]David Takacs, *The Idea of Biodiversity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

flows and biological organisms is set up, the global marketplace will do the rest.

The actual collection, identification, and cataloguing of millions of samples from the rainforest is carried out by "parataxonomists," whose status remains lower than that of scientists, and who are unfamiliar with bio-pharmaceutical nexuses and global environmental theory, but who combine a local knowledge of the forest with a training in basic taxonomy.

Markham, too, had employed a Quechua guide to lead him to the Cinchona Calisaya plant almost 150 years earlier. He openly declared in his memoirs:

> I owe much to the intelligent assistance of our guide Martinez, who, to great experience in woodcraft, added a lynx's eye for a Calisaya-plant; and it required no little quickness and penetration to distinguish these treasures, amidst the close entanglement of the undergrowth, in the dense forests. Martinez spoke Spanish very imperfectly, and, without a knowledge of Quicha [sic], I should have found much difficulty in conversing with him; but he had a most complete and thorough knowledge of all forest lore, and was acquainted with the native name of almost every plant, and with the uses to which they were or might be applied.[11]

Martinez is a good guide because he has empirical knowledge of his surroundings. As in much colonial discourse, the "Native" here knows "Nature." However, the "native" is also represented as too close for objective knowledge; too close for knowledge that is abstractable from the thick tangle of information about the places and things that it comes embedded in.

Fragment 2:

In 1993 the U.S. Department of Commerce filed a patent claim on the cell line of a 26-year-old Guayami woman from Panama. Her cell line was of interest because some Guayami people carry a unique virus, and their antibodies were believed to be useful in leukemia research. Dr. Jonathan Kaplan of Altanta's Center for Disease Control (CDC) was

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[11]Markham, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

listed in the patent application as the "inventor" of the cell line. Protests by religious and indigenous communities led to the withdrawal of the patent claim by the Department of Commerce in November 1993. Patent claims were also filed for the cell lines of indigenous people from the Solomon Islands. The Solomon Islands government demanded withdrawal of the patent applications and repatriation of the genetic samples, citing an invasion of sovereignty, lack of informed consent, and moral grounds as the reasons for protest. The U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown, rejected these requests, stating that "there is no provision for considerations related to the source of the cells that may be the subject of a patent application." According to existing patent law, the source of a genetic sample is irrelevant.

This had not always been the case. The source of a genetic sample had been deemed relevant in the pre-1980 understanding of "nature" as being beyond ownership. The not patentable status of "products of nature" such as life-forms, however, was overturned in the landmark 1980 U.S. Supreme Court case, Diamond v. Chakrabarty, which awarded the patent on a genetically engineered oil-eating bacteria to GE microbiologist Ananda Chakrabarty.[12]

Fragment 3:

In 1995, two University of Mississippi pharmacologists received a patent for the "use of turmeric in wound healing" with the United States Patent and Trade Mark Office. News headlines in India announced: "Indian scientists caught napping as two U.S. researchers patent traditional medicine." Not only has turmeric been used in India for over a thousand years in healing, in cuisine, and even as a skin-rejuvenating face pack by women, its use is documented in literary, religious and scientific texts. Nor has its use declined as modern cures and cosmetics hit the market — one of the best selling face creams in India is the corporate-produced Vicco Turmeric Vanishing Cream, and secular modern moms regularly use turmeric concoctions in the treatment of everything from sore throats to sprained ankles.

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[12]This set a precedent that has led to a number of patents on forms of "nature." In 1985, the USPTO granted a patent to Dr. Kenneth Hibberd on the culture, seed, and plant of an entire line of corn. In 1987, it granted a patent to Philip Leder and Timothy Stewart on a genetically engineered mouse.

As it turned out, the patent granted did not qualify for the "novelty" and "non-obviousness" clauses in patent law, and was overturned after being challenged in court by several groups including Vandana Shiva's Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, and India's Council for Scientific and Industrial Reaearch (CSIR). In practice, however, expertise and resources required to contest all patent cases are not universally accessible. India has only two patent monitoring bodies, neither of which has adequate funding. Scientists and administrators in India throw up their hands in helplessness, answering irritably to local groups outraged at the violation:

> A million patents are being granted every year globally. There are over 30 million patent documents available currently....It is impossible for [us] to keep tab[s] on what is being patented all over the world.[13]

Also commonly cited along with the 1995 turmeric story is the sudden rush by U.S., German and Japanese corporations to patent compounds derived from Neem [*Azadirachta Indica*], a tree which has extensive therapeutic properties, once again traditionally known and documented. Because the Indian scientific-industrial nexus is poorly developed, Indian companies were unable to gather information and submit applications for products even when they were based on properties of neem compounds that had been studied in modern Indian laboratories. Thus out of the 36 patents on neem granted between 1985 and 1995, India held six, while U.S. corporations held 22 (headed by W.R. Grace, with 11).

Scene 3: Anti-neo-colonialism

B. K. Keala, founder of the activist coalition National Working Group on Patent Laws, called in an August 1996 interview for local groups to inform themselves of international regulations so that they would be able to press for royalties for the use of intellectual property. He warned:

> Coming generations [will] blame us for surrendering to the west without even a pretence of protest, as we blame our ancestors who surrendered to the East India Company.[14]

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[13]Rai, Ministry of Industry, quoted in "The Stolen Turmeric," *The Week*, August 4, 1996, pp. 12-15.
[14]*Ibid.*

In 1993, an activist group of farmers burned Cargill Seeds' office in South India, to protest what they saw as a corporate attempt to establish monopolies on seeds that had been handed down and modified by generations of local farmers.

On December 30, 1994, India formally became a member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the new form of which the World Trade Organization (WTO) came into being on January 1, 1995. On December 31, 1994 the Indian President Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma issued two ordinances, one to amend the Indian Patents Act of 1970 and the other to effect changes in the Customs and Tariff Act of 1975, in order to bring Indian laws in line with the provisions of the GATT, a move criticized by Opposition parties, Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI [M]), and Janata Dal, as a misuse of the constitutional provision.[15]

In 1995, The Foundation on Economic Trends, an association of 200 academic, scientific and farm organizations from 37 countries, filed a petition against W. R. Grace's patent on a neem-based pesticide, on the basis that Indian farmers have been using the same compound for several centuries. Jeremy Rifkin, whose Foundation on Economic Trends also opposes biopiracy, said the action marked "the start of a counteroffensive against rich countries by developing nations that often are accused of stealing intellectual property."[16]

In 1998-99, the Indian NGO Gene Campaign and Forum for Food Security pushed for the establishment of a "national bio-resource authority" to negotiate the rights of farming and tribal communities to the profits from the prospecting of their biological resources.

In March 1999 Indian Industries Minister Sikhander Bakht piloted the Patents Amendment Bill through the Lok Sabha, with support from the Congress Party, but in the face of a walkout by the Janata Dal, CPM, and other left parties. The bill's passage was required by the WTO's Exclusive Marketing Rights requirement for pharmaceuticals and agro-chemical industries.

In November 1999, social movements and NGOs from all over the world dramatically disrupted the Seattle meeting of the WTO, calling attention to the environmental and labor regulations being decimated in

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[15]*The Hindu*, December 30, 1994 and December 31, 1994.
[16]*West's Legal News*, "Intellectual Property," September 18, 1995 (9-18-95 WLN 2002).

the name of free trade. Meanwhile, on November 24, 1999, more than 300 *adivasis* (indigenous people) from Madhya Pradesh jumped over the fence of the New Delhi office of the World Bank and covered the building with posters, grafitti, cow dung, and mud, calling for the end of World Bank and WTO-sponsored neocolonialism. They delivered a letter that stated: "We fought against the British and we will fight against the new form of colonialism that you represent with all our might."[17]

In May 2000, in response to a challenge by three Indian groups, the European Patent Office revoked the patent for a neem-based pesticide that had been granted jointly to the USDA and W. R. Grace.

Today the Indian state, much like the Peruvian and Bolivian governments in 1850, mounted nationalist resistance against the West, but does little to consolidate intellectual property rights for bio-resources. Meanwhile, activist groups are arming themselves with the new language of GATT and Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and studying the fine print of the WTO. In this respect, local resistance to hegemonic economic power and to the narrative of universal science is far more robust and systematic today than it was in Markham's time. Farmers, landless workers, and *adivasis* are painfully aware of the fact that their knowledge — of the diversity in seed types, of crop rotation patterns, and home remedies of roots and leaves — is a factor in both local and global processes of production and distribution of wealth. Northern farmers have seen this in the case of the hybridization of corn and other food crops since the 1930s, and with the dramatic effect of the decline of midwestern U.S. family farms in the 1980s. As Vandana Shiva argued in 1993:

> The conflict is not between farmers of the North and those of the South, but between small farmers everywhere and multinationals.[18]

That conflict has played itself out globally and locally in the last decade of the 20th century and promises to intensify in the 21st.

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[17]News originally from narmada listserv, archived at <www.agp.org>.
[18] Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (London: Zed Books 1993), p. 231.

4. The State, History, and Intellectuals

What do these scenes help us understand about ecopolitics in the context of present-day global trade and nationalism? What opportunities and obstacles confront the political ecologist today, particularly with respect to the new environmental activism, and its connections to the growing anti-globalization movement? Here I investigate some of the lessons that lie at the intersections of the histories alluded to above. Although the historical record substantiates the allegation of neo-colonialism in bio-resource ownership and exchange, it complicates our readings of nationalist anti-globalism.

When we employ a longer time frame than the last 50 years, we see immediately that the political and national ownership of knowledge is older than the prophets of globalization imply. When we hear claims of unprecedented novelty in today's rhetoric of international free flow of science, technology, and plant species, we might recall that these were also central elements in the global economy of the 19th century.

The important point to glean from such histories is not simply or merely one of periodization, rather, it is that each period's trade in knowledge was controlled by the dominant political powers. In the 19th century, the humanitarian rhetoric of scientific progress and the rhetoric of global trade obscured the underlying truths of empires and armed might. Today the threat of force still remains the backdrop for free marketeering,[19] and the globalist rhetoric is reminiscent of 19th century globalization of knowledge. The charges of neo-colonialism thus need to be taken seriously, and their historical support explicated.

However, the analysis does not end with the charge of neo-colonialism. (If we could simply identify a neo-colonial elite who masterminded modes of exploiting Southern nations, global trade reform might be easily accomplished.) The collaboration between financial institutions and multinational corporations is often represented by libertarians as a conspiracy. However, we should remember that this collaboration works not through coercion alone, but also via the hegemonic crafting of an apparently global consensus. Once we begin to explore the historical (re)production of neo-colonialism, we notice that even activities apparently removed from the central ideological

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[19]Witness the use of violent police tactics against the Seattle and Washington, D.C. demonstrators, followed by violent crackdowns on anti-globalization protestors around the world.

mechanisms of the new world order are often fundamental to its functioning. Ideologies that may have been (or are) oppositional to neo-colonialist modernity (romanticism, nationalism, anti-western nativism) often themselves prop up the structures of the new world order.

Consider, for example, the romantic nostalgia for the return to a putative period of "harmony" between humans and nature. The popularity of this perspective is a testament not so much to a radical critical sensibility as it is to the persistence and flexibility of Orientalist and colonial structures of thought. Some of the characteristic assumptions of 19th century colonial thought involved the putative proximity of the "native" to nature; the supposed inability of indigenous cultures to abstract facts from context and to convert knowledge into productive force; and the gendering of hierarchies between (masculinized) public and (feminized) private spaces. Such assumptions structured not only colonial thought but also colonial institutions and practices. Through educational, administrative, and cultural reproduction, neo-colonialist and Orientalist patterns of belief have remained strong long after formal decolonization. To the extent that "friends of the environment" today postulate the models of inherently eco-friendly natives, they extend the practices and discourses of 19th century colonialism, perpetuating an idealist misrecognition, rather than a materially grounded critique, of colonial and post-colonial modernity. Romanticist nostalgia calls into service essentialist dichotomies, such as "innocent" versus "violent" epistemologies, or feminized and spiritualized, familial "private" relations of community versus masculinized, secular, "public" relations of science and the market. Romanticist eco-communitarians in the South wish to avoid engagement with the threatening "outsiders" with whom they have been linked through global flows of capital and technology. Some imagine the nation as analogous to a family, and the private, "internal" space of community/indigeneity as a bulwark against modernity (the latter represented by an invading science, technology, objectivity or "Reason"). But one can refuse engagement with the outsider/"Other" only in an ideative realm of pure thought. In the material realm, modernity and indigeneity, the private and the public spheres, and scientific knowledge and customary practice are already hopelessly entangled in the rather old networks of human and capital flows.

As a second example of the ambivalent radicalism of oppositional eco-politics, consider the nationalist argument against multinational capital, articulated in terms of local entrepreneurial needs. Among other new players on the post-colonial scene are indigenous capitalists. Small

entrepreneurs and big businessmen alike in Southern nations have turned to "herbal" remedies and "indigenous" medicine, recognizing the large domestic and international market. Many of the patent disputes threaten to disrupt their profits as deeply as, and sooner than, they will affect a subsistence farmer. Monsanto's or Merck's lawyers, for instance, would find more fertile ground in blocking an indigenous manufacturer of neem products than in blocking a peasant from brushing his teeth with a neem twig. Indigenous neem-product manufacturers anxiously try, as does Merck, to corner the market on neem leaves, contributing to the rise in prices that puts neem out of reach of the local consumer. At the same time, Southern capitalists (in partnership with Northern seekers of authentic indigeneity), rather than peasant or tribal producers, usually profit from "direct marketing" programs to sell eco-friendly products to well-intentioned liberal consumers in the North. Nationalist indigenous capitalists, who have less capital than Northern corporations, may have much to gain from blocking the WTO; but they do not share the goals of the radicals who critique global capitalism. It remains to be seen who will benefit from Indian-owned patents to natural resources, seen by local green forces as evidence of successful resistance against globalization. There is a distinction between gains for the local peasant and for the local entrepreneur that is often — conveniently, for the entrepreneur — elided in nationalist anti-global rhetoric.[20]

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[20]For example, Abhay Phadke, a Pune-based bio-tech entrepreneur who participated in the legal battle to overturn W. R. Grace's neem fungicide patent, and C. M. Ketkar, founder of the Neem Mission, complained that the Indian government does not reward entrepreneurs for protecting Indian bio-property rights. Citing "neglect and callousness on the part of the [Indian] government" in contrast to Western governments' support of the exploitation of bio-property, Ketkar and Phadke expressed regret that their government was not more actively involved in contesting the neem patent. Further, Phadke commented, the survival of Indian companies such as his own Ajay Bio-Tech was at stake when the government added "insult to injury" by doubling domestic duty on neem ("European Patent Office Revokes W. R. Grace's Neem Patent," *Financial Express*, Pune, May 17, 2000). While Phadke represents himself, in this interview, as allied with the interests of a group like Shiva's CSIR, he gives no hint of an anti-capitalist critique of globalization. Rather, he is concerned that the national bourgeoisie get access to neem. Nothing in this logic invites optimism regarding the rights of access of peasants to these resources or the profits from them.

Third, consider the other players who have much to gain from the slippage between anti-neo-colonialism and anti-Westernism: the right wing, nativist religious forces of the South. In India particularly, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its ideologically allied groups (forming the *Sangh Parivar*, a neo-fascist family of political organizations)[21] stand much to gain from the rhetoric of indigeneity and anti-Westernization. The strategies of the BJP as a nationalist political party, and its state-level policy decisions as well as its grass-roots networks, are complex and disturbing. We should not allow their agendas to be subsumed or obscured in the diffuse good intentions of anti-colonial struggle.

Putting globalization into historical context, we can see that global networks of knowledge, commerce, and science are not entirely novel phenomena. Insights into post-colonial conflicts over scientific knowledge and environmental rights can be gained by studying global trade patterns and the rhetoric of scientific knowledge in the 19th century. This is not to say that it has *all* happened before. Both the postmodern position ("metanarratives are always totalitarian, untrue, and bad; relativist local narratives that eschew totalizing critique are the only option"), and the simple anti-Enlightenment critique of colonial science ("the Scientific West brought in reductionistic methods, the holistic East retains inherent harmony with nature") need revision in this age of constantly-morphing globalization.

New legal paradigms and global environmental policies are being made in the crucible of nationalism and globalization. States, multinational corporations, and activists have shown that they can all be supple international actors. Many academics don't quite know what to make of this phenomenon yet. Policy-oriented analyses of environmental conflict are unable adequately to trace the sinuous trajectories of nationalism and globalization. The politics of nationalism is an inherently modern phenomenon in India — not a revival of ancient or "fundamental" notions of religion. The combination of anti-Enlightenment critiques of science and anti-Western religious politics has united strange bedfellows in contemporary environmental politics. Postmodernists, traditionalists, and romanticists all seem to cathect the rhetoric of nationalist anti-modernity. Theorists and activists need to join critical forces so as to formulate a principled,

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[21]See Sumit Sarkar, "The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar," *Economic and Political Weekly,* January 30, 1993.

historically accurate and anti-essentialist framework within which we might begin to untangle the interlinked strands of eco- and geo-politics.

Revisiting historical and contemporary narratives of nature's ownership, and interrogating them for lessons for today, forces a convergence of questions about the construction of identity, the effects of globalization on communities, the micro-politics of botanical entrepreneurship, and the rise of fascist nationalism. Much scholarship exists in these disparate fields; yet it is rarely addressed in South environmental scholarship. Rather than guide us through the tangled thickets of ideology that I have only hinted at above, environmentalist intellectuals (in contrast to other social scientists, and humanists[22]) remain silent about the increasingly fascistic politics of Indian nationalism, identity, and community. Instead, the invocation of community solidarity around nature's inherent sanctity is assumed self-evidently progressive; only a rationalist neo-colonialist Cartesian, we are led to believe, would fail to be moved by the idea's warm and fuzzy aura. This is a fuzziness that grows more disturbing as it encompasses more multifarious and contradictory political ideologies.[23]

5. Indian Eco-Politics

In the first half of this article, I advocated the practice of a materially-grounded political economy and history of ecology. The notion of "environmentalism" can be divorced from historical issues of social justice and global equity only by willfully ignoring the ways in

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[22]Historians Sumit Sarkar and K. N. Panikkar, untiring and erudite critics of fascist nationalisms, were recently prevented, through the BJP's pressure on Oxford University Press, from publishing a history text. Protesters wrote:

> We see this entire move first and foremost as a blatant attempt to stifle secular historical scholarship by imposing censorship on the work of two of India's leading social historians. We also see it in the context and logic of the increasing attacks on minorities and on artists, film-makers and intellectuals who have remained committed to the vision of a secular and democratic India. (Letter to Prime Minister Vajpayee from Citizens in Defense of Democracy, a broadbased alliance of teachers, mediapersons, writers, artists, and students. Source: Secular Democratic South Asia Listserv, <sec-dem-sa@mit.edu>.)

[23]For a cautionary tale about the politics of romanticism, see, for example, Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 1995).

which local resource-use is tied today to the development of a new stage of capitalist globalization. As James O' Connor notes, the World Bank teaches the South that "human health and well-being and education are components of 'human capital,' that the environment is 'natural capital,' and that community is 'community capital.'"[24] More than ever, it is necessary simultaneously to be political economists, historians, and ecologists; to be theorists and activists; to be internationalists and critics of the globalist model of free trade. Since none of us is trained in all these fields, learning from each other is not just a good idea, it's our best option. But, as noted, coalitions and collaborative movements are laced with unacknowledged political differences. In order to be robust and successful in the long run, coalitions must find ways for their internal "factions" to engage constructively over political issues.

Indian environmentalism is a case in point. Although powerful and politically influential, the environmentalist movement has found few productive ways to engage over factional differences. In the following sections, then, I take up some of the successes and silences in radical eco-political scholarship on India. This "case-study" does not purport to be a comprehensive survey of Indian environmentalism. It seeks to illustrate some of the multiple social and political valencies of eco-politics. It abjures the framework of "pure green" environment-alism, focusing instead on symptomatic issues at the nexus of "red-green" concerns in global political economy, ecology, and nationalism.

Since 1991, the Indian economy has been through the economic obstacle course (jumping through the hoops of deregulation, structural adjustment, liberalization, and IMF/ World Bank consultations) that became common for so many Latin American and African economies in the 1970s and 1980s. Loans from International Financial Institutions (IFIs), tied to structural adjustment programs (SAPs), have trapped developing countries in a cycle of debt, while diverting their economies away from a focus on domestic food security and social needs, toward the "international" mandate that they remain a source of raw materials and cheap labor and manufactured exports for Northern markets. Much has been written on the macro-economics of such transformations, and the obvious resonance of the modernization-as-neo-colonialism narrative

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[24]James O'Connor, "House Organ," *CNS*, 11, 3, September, 2000, p. 164.

has been deployed powerfully by grassroots groups all over the South, against the encroachments of multinational capital.[25]

Meanwhile, the needs and rights of local populations have, through the international discourse on "indigenous rights," come to be vigorously debated and analyzed in what sometimes seems a parallel but toothless discourse. The International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) notes in its preamble "the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities...on biological resources, and the desirability of sharing equitably benefits arising from the use of traditional knowledge." India ranks fifth in the world's population classified as "indigenous peoples," with an estimated 54 million thus categorized. Despite the CBD and other post-Rio declarations, the paths of economic liberalization and development critique seem well insulated from one another in the realm of policy, meeting only when the depredations of SAPs abroad and small farmer bankruptcies at home erupt in protest demonstrations.

The Uruguay Round of GATT, concluded in December 1993, finalized the Dunkel Draft to which India is a signatory. One of the most significant aspects of the Draft for natural resources was the controversial issue of intellectual property rights as they apply to plant products. The conflict between local users and international pharmaceutical companies manifested itself right away in the form of demonstrations by political parties (both left-wing and nationalist) and grass-roots NGOs against the Indian government's signing of the Dunkel Draft. Organizations for the protection of indigenous knowledge argued that the new economic order privileged multinational pharmaceutical corporations. They claimed that in issuing corporate patents on herbs and medicinal plants that have been traditionally used by many groups, international law failed to recognize the contribution of indigenous people to the preservation of valuable biological products over several centuries, and, further, that such patents threatened the free use of these plants by local communities. Feminist groups argued that rural women's knowledge of ritual plants and healing practices would be eroded by the encroaching forces of modernity. Multinational corporations, on the other hand, contended that the chemical and genetic

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[25]See, e.g., Danaher, ed., *op. cit.*; Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (London: South End Press, 1997); Bruce Rich, *Mortgaging the Earth: The World Bank, Environmental Impoverishment, and the Crisis of Development* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

engineering processes that these resources passed through in their laboratories established the final product as existing within the province and ownership of modern techno-scientific enterprise. Since 1993, both corporate and anti-corporate sides have won victories in the battle over the globalization of nature.

Almost any "local" progress is contradictory when the systemic questions are global and the international political stakes high. Gains for Asian elites are easily and systematically translated, through the flexibility and mobility of capital, into losses for U.S. unions or a boost for xenophobic ideologies. For instance, while techno-optimist publications like *Wired* magazine celebrated the new Chinese information-technology entrepreneurs, some traditionalist American labor unionists took jingoistic stands during the U.S. debate over restoring Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) with China, protesting that Chinese workers were "taking" U.S. workers' jobs; meanwhile, massive lay-offs of Chinese workers flung thousands into poverty as they were caught in the transition from state socialism to global capitalism. "Local" responses were contradictory, as both Left and Right found the complexities of globalization difficult to pin down. On the environmental front, then, we would expect matters to be no less contradictory. Gains for "biodiversity" can mean increased influence for western pharmaceuticals in Southern nations but also increased funding for southern environmental NGOs. So, for instance, while international biodiversity preservation interests generously fund local southern NGOs, they often open up channels for pharmaceutical corporations to access local knowledge of medicinal uses of plants. The nature of the "ecology versus trade" debate has different implications in different national contexts, and actors — from radical to reformist — perceive differently the extent to which global trade can or should be rejected. This determines the political agendas, modes of representation, and negotiating styles that each group brings to the global domain.

The buzzwords of "sustainability" and "conservation" are used by corporate deforesters and biological crusaders, but the popular circulation of a global discourse of environmentalism simply glosses over political differences among these actors. The legal issues around the patenting of such well known natural substances as neem, turmeric, and basmati have reached public consciousness through the mass media, causing outrage along a wide political spectrum. The ownership of natural entities and the commodification of "life" appear to fly in the face of principles of justice based on anything from spiritualism to socialism. Indeed, the slippage between religious and political grounds for the contestation of intellectual property rights is one of several

curiously fuzzy domains in this discussion. Fuzziness is only occasionally a result of the absence of information — fuzziness does help some of the people some of the time. Materialist historical and political analysis can help us track both the fuzzy and the dogmatic claims made in the interests of nature and justice. When theoretical assumptions and strategic essentialisms are elucidated, the stakes and trade-offs become clearer, and thus more open to genuinely constructive engagements.

On the face of it, the patent debate appears to be a straightforward case of conflict between Western industrialized nations, propelled by a multinational pharmaceutical lobby seeking to monopolize ownership of natural resources; and developing nations, seeking an equitable share in the trade of their own natural wealth. This is the official representation of the conflict, at the level of the state; it was challenged and modified by the NGO presence at the Rio Earth Summit and its aftermath. Southern NGOs have raised the question of indigenous populations' rights to nature, and their conflicted relationships with their own states. The UN working group on Indigenous Populations and several large and small NGOs have, in the past decade, created an international voice for indigenous peoples' groups, thus creating a new category of international actor in the debate over property rights to nature.

Several aspects of this debate hint at the ideological questions that lie at the heart of globalization and the growth of biotechnology. Implicit in the multinational insistence on tying together property rights, free markets, and progress are Lockean assumptions about the ownership and "improvement" of property. Implicit in Southern states' opposition to patent claims on their natural resources are claims about historical accountability and the right to demand reparations for past injustices. For example, the American patenting of modified strains of basmati rice *(Texmati* and *Kasmati)* is undergirded by the assumption that private capital can be spurred to continual innovation only if it is awarded the rights of exclusive ownership of and profits from the physical and intellectual labor expended on its products. The Indian contestation of this and similar patents is based, most simply, on the claim that the modified strains are neither novel nor non-obvious. Further, until recently, the Indian Patent Act specifically excluded agricultural and pharmaceutical inventions from patentability; the new intellectual property regimes that are being put into place by the WTO

fundamentally challenge this patent policy.[26] But more profoundly, the Southern argument rests on a premise of historical accountability. This deeper premise suggests that the West had access to its raw material — such as indigenous basmati strains, developed by Indian farmers over centuries of experiments in plant breeding — only by virtue of the force of arms and the power of a colonial state that appropriated tropical resources while postulating inherent native laziness and indigenous incapacity to productively "improve" nature. Embedded in this debate, then, are historical questions about power and ideology — questions that the law is ill equipped to handle.[27]

Earlier in this article I proposed the central importance of historical readings to the analysis and resolution of global environmental conflicts. Much of the historical argument is thought already to reside in the catch-phrase "neo-colonialism" that often accompanies Southern critiques of Northern patent law. Unpacking the historical claims, however, bring us back to the re-examination of complex concerns about colonialism and its "new" modes of resurgence, including its relationship to nationalism, its reliance on the interdependence of Northern and Southern capitalism, and its opportunistic perpetuation of existing semi-feudal hierarchies of gender and caste. Although these issues are familiar to historians and political economists, the catch-all phrase "neo-colonialism" as used in "green" environmentalist discourse seems to miss the nuances of those words. The exclusive emphasis on

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[26]The Patents Act, 1970 (India) excludes from patenting "any process for the medicinal, surgical, curative, prophylactic, or other treatment of human beings or any process for a similar treatment of animals or plants to render them free of disease or to increase their economic value or that of their products." (See Patents Act (India) § 3(h) and § 3 (i).) Under pressure from international financial institutions and WTO member-nations, the Indian Patent Act has recently been modified.

[27]These histories, along with the current wave of opposition to globalization, do indeed have implications for international law. In other words, historical claims about power can affect the practice of law. For example, Mohammed Bedjaoui, a former President of the International Court of Justice, called for a revolution in international law that would give prominence to "the principle of equity (which corrects inequalities)." Its objective would be "reducing, and...even eradicating the gap that exists between a minority of rich nations and a majority of poor nations." See Mohammed Bedjaoui, *Towards a New International Economic Order* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1979), p. 127.

North-South relations runs the risk of obscuring the stratifications and competing interests within Southern societies themselves.

6. Radical Successes and Silences: Indian Eco-Intellectuals in an Age of Global Trade and Nationalism

Some of the most important environmentalist intellectuals of the last two decades have emerged through research on the South Asian subcontinent's environmental politics; they have rightfully been accorded a respected place in the international pantheon of eco-theorists. But in the Indian context alone, the intellectual politics of environmentalism is as riven and contradictory as the global terrain of struggle. The West's reception of the subcontinent's intellectuals, however, seems to echo the homogenizing tendencies that for centuries characterized western reception of non-western thought. Indian theorists are commonly seen by Northern intellectuals and activists as all advocating some generalized anti-colonial critique of western science, with the implication that the removal of western ideas and capital will transport the subcontinent back to a happier pre-colonial time. The subcontinent's own internal arguments are more complex than this; but the repeated celebration of a particular kind of narrative by western intellectuals has a skewing effect (due in part to the globalization of intellectual discourse) on subcontinental politics.

The general effect of the simplification and celebration of the basic anti-colonial critique is to ignore (and to disempower) the more complex and difficult conversations that need to grow. We have still to work out effective national and grassroots strategies with respect to the disparate material and intellectual phenomena that shape eco-politics: international capital and academic discourse, religion and nationalism, anti- and post-marxisms, agrarian economies and critiques of village-level casteism and patriarchies, urban development and critiques of urbanism, free market capitalism and anti-market communitarianism. We have still to work out, in practice, the meanings of our appropriations of, and reactions against, a multitude of academic theoretical positions, from ecofeminism and deep ecology through poststructuralism and red-green political ecology. Clearly, such a working-out is beyond the scope of a single essay, and ought to happen through discussions, collaborative projects, and activist-academic coalitions.

The remainder of this article attempts to sketch the outlines of the successes and contradictions of Indian environmental scholarship. Such a sketch, while calling for a longer investigation, already suggests that

a sustainable resistance to the neo-liberal corporate ownership of nature can be nurtured only through a simultaneous focus on progressive theory and praxis. We ignore our theoretical differences at the risk that they will come back to haunt and to hobble our activist practices.

The mechanisms of corporate globalization and the role of industrialized nations in it entail a sophisticated use of global and local, northern and southern, conservative and liberal forces. In resistance, scholars and activists are faced with the need to do more than simply invert the binaries of Enlightenment Science or Orientalist Culturalism. Nationalist anti-globalizers and traditionalist anti-modernizers, however, while recognizing the encroachments of globalizing capital as the new face of imperialism, often believe that resistance resides in the inversion of the "tradition versus modernity" binary. Because of the contradictory positions involved in such a choice, the Left and the Right appear, to some observers, to have converged.

The direction and policies of the Indian State have over the last decade been increasingly directed by the ideology of Hindu nationalism, which values authenticity and "tradition" over "modernity" and the west, while simultaneously distancing itself, through a new American-style anti-communism,[28] from the politics of "non-alignment" with Cold War superpowers and the socialist stances which characterized post-independence Indian policy. In this new rhetoric, multinational capital is portrayed as the agent of neo-colonialism.[29] The daily newspaper *The Hindu* reported on December 27, 1994 that the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, a group it described as "the newest front organisation of the [*Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*] RSS,"[30] was distributing "saffron coloured

[28]Although the BJP's anti-communism is in keeping with the new global mood of conservatism, it is unusual in India's own historical context. The much-touted "Kerala model," poster-child of Indian state development, celebrated even by Bill Clinton on his visit in March, 2000, is based on a socialist economic model, as were the first seven national "Five Year Plans" after independence.

[29]But at the same time, the BJP government has shepherded all the critical penetrative instruments of the WTO into the Indian economy, including the removal of quantitative restrictions on imports by April 2001 (signed in December 1999), the Insurance Regulatory and Development authority bill, and the entry of foreign capital up to 100 percent of the equity of a company (which received Cabinet approval in January 2000). See Prakash Karat, "Becoming a Junior Partner," *Frontline*, April 14, 2000.

leaflets" calling for the consumer rejection of multinational products, as part of its campaign against globalization:

> A concerted campaign has been launched by the [Swadeshi Jagran] Manch against multinationals and their everyday consumer products like soaps, detergents, cool drinks and toothpaste. In their fights against "globalisation" of the Indian economy, the Manch organisers have virtually called for a boycott of goods manufactured even by those Indian companies which have agreements with multi-nationals and have diluted their own equity holdings to below 50 percent.[31]

The populist Right repeatedly calls for resistance to western consumerism. As Vandana Shiva and the environmentalist Left have argued, it is indeed imperative to launch activist struggles against multinational capital, especially in the areas of seed production and biotechnology, fertilizers, pesticides, and other agricultural products, and consumer products which use the patented results of biopiracy or which displace the sustainable local use of resources.[32] Have the

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[30]The RSS, a nationalist Hindu organization, was founded in 1925 by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. Hedgewar believed that "the hindu culture is the life-breath of Hindusthan [India]. It is therefore clear that if Hindusthan [India] is to be protected, we should first nourish the hindu culture" see <http://rss.org>). The RSS is part of a "family" of Hindu nationalist organizations jointly referred to as the *Sangh Parivar* (these include the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the student-led ABVP, and the VHP) (See <http://rss.org/parivar>). The Swadeshi Jagran Manch is not literally a part of the RSS; *The Hindu* journalist's comment here is based on a perceived continuity in ideological stances rather than a literal claim of card-carrying membership.

[31]*The Hindu* report on December 27, 1994. The same article notes that consumers were exhorted not to wear jeans, even when they were made by a 100 percent Indian company. Although, as *The Hindu* notes, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch supports a conservative version of "tradition" that is compatible with the *Sangh Parivar*'s agenda, it must be remembered that the BJP's version of religion is a deeply modernist one. This understanding of the modernist right suggests that the BJP's notion of governance will not, in the long run, fundamentally challenge the West's plans for a new globalized economic order.

[32]Vandana Shiva, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature & Knowledge* (South End Press, 1997).

Environmentalist Left and the Nationalist Right converged, then, on this issue?[33]

An empiricist understanding of eco-politics might hold that the Left and the Right have indeed converged with respect to anti-globalization demands. Indeed, environmental sociologist Ramachandra Guha recently portrayed a leftist anti-dam activist as identical to an RSS ideologue, on the basis that both oppose globalization.[34] Nevertheless — although the Left and the Right might appear to converge on the globalization question — there is a great deal of difference between a materialist anti-imperialism (properly associated with a leftist critique) and a metaphysical politics of authenticity (which invariably accompanies the right-wing version). Conflating the two amounts to more than just an instance of sloppy analysis; it has the effect of "marking" both Left and Right as equally and identically tainted by an extremist ideology, thus accomplishing the positivist sleight-of-hand by which the unmarked comes to be labelled objective and true. What Guha, in his critique of activist-writer Arundathi Roy, rendered non-extremist — and therefore virtuous — was (to the surprise of many of his environmentalist supporters) the global market, and indigenous hi-tech capitalists.

> As anyone except Ms. Roy knows, the IT [Information Technology] industry uses a fraction of the energy that conventional factories do. With this tiny

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[33]At a time when the historic opponents once represented by the spotted owl and the lumberjack have joined hands, as exemplified by the teamsters and turtles at Seattle, or organized labor and the anti-IMF protestors in DC, such coalitions are eminently possible. While the Romanticist Environmental Left and the Nationalist Right have not, to my knowledge, formed coalitions in the Indian public sphere, the rhetoric of these two factions admits considerably broad agreement.

[34]Ramachandra Guha, "The Arun Shourie of the Left," *The Hindu,* November 26, 2000. The article, letters, and Guha's response to letters are available at <www.the-hindu.com>. Ramachandra Guha is one of South Asia's pre-eminent environmental scholars. The activist in question was Booker Prize-winning novelist and celebrity Arundathi Roy, who has been in the news lately as a result of her protests against India's nuclear bomb and her outrage at the human and environmentalist costs of the Sardar Sarovar dam project on the Narmada river. She participated in several actions in solidarity with the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), an activist movement to save the Narmada river valley and its inhabitants from submergence in the dam's catchment area.

> fraction they have generated jobs, income, foreign exchange and social equity….The IT billionaires are, in comparison with Indian industrialists of other times and stripes, more ethical and more innovative. They have given back a great deal more to society than they have taken out of it. Instead of attacking them in this ill-informed way, Ms. Roy could more fruitfully have studied how their success might be complemented by necessary reforms in other spheres of our economic and political life.[35]

The Information Technology industry here appears environmentally virtuous (by way of its energy conservation, but by ignoring the use of toxic chemicals and low-wage labor in the manufacture of chips as well as the pollution entailed by the disposal of computers and the waste products of manufacture), while Roy's defense of the Narmada anti-dam movement is portrayed as extremist.

Guha's critique of Roy was based on his perceived need to protect the "*gravitas*" of environmental scholarship and national development from the "hysteria" and "hyperbole" of activists and novelists. His supporters seemed attracted by his attack on a celebrity-activist rather than by any reasoned argument he had made.

The confused aftermath of Guha's public attack on Roy is symptomatic of the silences that bedevil Indian eco-politics. In effect, Guha was trying to silence an activist, non-academic perspective by "pulling rank "as a senior academic. Suggesting that Roy should simply cease speaking about Indian environmentalism, Guha implied that Roy had no right to the analytical perch occupied by academics and other true intellectuals, as she was merely a creative writer and novice activist. Tellingly, Guha proceeded to defend "globalization" and hi-tech comprador capitalism against Roy's radical critique of *adivasi* resettlement and World Bank-initiated dam projects. Green intellectuals

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[35]Ramachandra Guha, "Perils of Extremism," *The Hindu*, December 17, 2000. Some of Guha's aversion to the "social justice" claims of environmental activists, as well as his apparent bracketing of labor issues in the IT industry, is reminiscent of middle-class environmentalist reactions to the Environmental Justice Movement in the U.S. In the bourgeois version of environmentalism, energy-efficiency would be considered a primary concern, while social justice would not qualify as an "environmental" issue.

are quick to critique consumption (the villains of Guha's ecological theory are urban "omnivores" — those who consume excessive resources), but often fail to connect this to the ownership of the means of production and the exploitative structure of social relations that obtain under global capitalism.[36]

Some of the boundary-drawing that Guha attempted to do, and the anti-activist comments made by his supporters (many, including one from the Ministry of Defense, supporting the nationalist importance of capitalist industrial development), are symptomatic of the simplistic analytical dichtomies and static modes of thought that have become sedimented in eco-political discourse.[37] Guha's positions, and the largely male, upper-class support it received, show that under the weight of "globalization," Indian environmentalists will continue to adopt positions shaped by their class interests, their caste- and gender-privilege, and their access to the goodies that the forces of globalization and nationalism offer their allies. The debate might have been productive if environmentalist discourse and practice — in both their academic and activist modes — could have called on an ongoing, rich debate over the issues of indigenous versus foreign capital, activist ethics versus opportunism, and historical materialism versus the politics of identity, in preference to feeding on personality clashes and the competitive anxieties of professional-boundary policing. The lack of constructive engagement in Guha's critique of Roy is due in part to our prior failure to acknowledge the differences that already existed among our various global and local allegiances to environmentalist and nationalist politics. We need to begin by acknowledging that "Indian environmentalism" is not one thing; the social and political agendas written into its different valencies reveal that much more is at stake than super stardom and professional pride. We must pay attention to the pre-existing caste, class, and gender stratifications in our societies as well as to the ways in which global capitalism rigifies existing power

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[36]A similar point is made by Doug Henwood about "localist" greens, in his article "Antiglobalization," *Left Business Observer*, 71, January, 1996, <http://www.panix.com/~dhenwood/Globalization.html>.

[37]Among those who responded to Guha, the most cogent critiques came from Chitaroopa Palit, "The Historian as Gatekeeper," *Frontline*, 17, 26, December 23, 2000-January 5, 2001; and S. Ravi Rajan, "In which Lord Ram Gave it those Ones," *Tehelka*, December 21, 2000, <www.tehelka.com>.

relations and stabilizes new modes of discipline, even among self-described progressives.

Most obviously missing from our discussion has been an analysis of the new "globalizing" modes of capitalism, and a full understanding of the role of the Indian state and its nationalist elite in the re-drawing of developmental priorities. At least three positions would need to be identified and debated in this discussion: (1) the anti-capitalist opposition to globalization and its environmentalist consequences (this would encompass the positions of red-green activists, as well as other leftist positions in North and South nations); (2) the nationalist argument in favor of *fair* free trade supporting domestic capital accumulation but not subordinating national development to U.S. interests (this would encompass right-wing nationalists as well as some indigenous neo-liberal capitalists in the South); and (3) the global free trade agenda which seeks to subordinate the development of Southern nations to Northern economic and political interests (this would encompass Northern capitalist interests and an elite Southern globalist comprador class). Framing the debate in this way would suggest, first, the need (or opportunity) for an articulation, by environmentalists and anti-dam activists, of a deeper and more explicit critique of nationalist and imperialist capital, linked to their critique of the oppression of *adivasis* by the forces of "development" and "scientific progress." Second, it would require academic environmentalists to articulate their analysis of global capital, and own up to their own stakes in the modes of development of indigenous capitalism and "globalization." These articulations would, in turn, help frame the formation of global coalitions and networks that engage simultaneously with politics of the economy as well as of the environment.

Such a framing would certainly force the articulation of differences among Southern eco-political actors, and even, some might warn, precipitate splits in alliances that currently link groups that are reformist or revolutionary, and pro- or anti-capitalist. The risk is worth taking. In the absence of a materialist political economic understanding of how environmentalist politics functions in the new global order, we are left with a chorus of "greener-than-thou" pronouncements which have splintered rather than strengthened these coalitions. Hidden by such choruses are, for example, the sophisticated critiques of imperialism that are, in fact, articulated "on the ground" in movements such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan; and the convoluted apologies for capitalism (with its potential for academic mobility and research-funding) that academics isolated from activism often make. History and praxis, intellection and activism, are already entangled. Yet we persist in

dividing them up, relegating the careful study of environmental history to academic intellectuals, and urgent activism to the organizers. This division of labor between activists and intellectuals, and the separation of their discourses, hinders a more complex engagement with these issues.

A complex political economic analysis of globalization already exists in myriad forms in the new outpouring of radical scholarship on the economics and politics of globalization.[38] However, environmentalist academics and well-meaning green policy analysts have paid too little attention to this scholarship, in part because their enthusiasm for broad popular coalitions provokes an anxiety to distance themselves from what they perceive as "vulgar marxist" or "economistic" analyses of capital flows and political economy. This anxiety serves us poorly. There is ample evidence that an economic and political analysis can be effectively combined with sophisticated historical, policy-oriented, or rhetorical analyses. For example, some of the most timely essays on global environment have been coming from an activist and writer who holds together broad global coalitions. Food First's director Anuradha Mittal, a diasporic South Asian activist intellectual whose writings have been broadly circulated (via the internet) since the Seattle uprising, links the analysis of environmentalism and globalization with a clarity and political commitment that professional academics might do well to emulate.[39]

The ecopolitical scholars surveyed below all articulate important and valid responses to the dilemmas of Southern agency in a globalized world. However, they explicitly or implicitly hold political positions that are at odds with each other. The more we avoid engagement with these contradictions, the less we are capable of building a concerted scholarly response to global capitalist environmentalism. We lose not only an opportunity to engage at a scholarly level but also the opportunity to build a successful movement in collaboration with activists mounting a challenge to Northern capital's activities in the South.

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[38]Sassen, *op. cit.*; Danaher, ed., *op. cit.*; William K. Tabb, "Globalization Is *An* Issue, the Power of Capital Is *The* Issue," *Monthly Review*, 49, June, 1997; Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994); Atul Kohli, "Politics of Economic Liberalization in India," *World Development*, 17, 3, 1989.
[39]See <www.foodfirst.org>.

The scholars discussed below have all published widely and creatively, and it is beyond the scope of this article to do comprehensive analyses of their work. It would, further, be counter-productive to embark here on purely textual critiques of a scholar's entire corpus, as I believe that whatever contradictions exist in our work must be worked out not only theoretically and textually, but also through the practice of politics and activism. The following sections, thus, are not intended as individual critiques so much as a global and political contextualization of some often un-noticed contradictions in South Asian ecopolitics. I attempt to identify, and illustrate, conflicting political readings of South Asian environmental scholarship. These will, I hope, illustrate the methodological gaps that this article has postulated, and make clear why the path toward transcending our contradictions and synthesizing our insights lies in a theoretically sophisticated praxis.

7. Indian Eco-Politics and "Traditionalist" Critiques of Colonialism

One of the most prolific and widely known South Asian environmentalist is Vandana Shiva, director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy. Shiva has forged a mix of activism, research, and policy-making, successfully using the tools of academia, media, and direct action to effect social change. Her work has facilitated genuine gains for Indian farmers, such as the setting up of community seed banks and the contestation of corporate intellectual property rights to neem compounds. While her activist agenda continues to grow in scope and power, her theoretical paradigms have aged poorly. Shiva's critique of the "patriarchal domination" of a metaphysically valued earth was a logical outgrowth of a 1970s style eco-feminism, but its essentialist over-generalizations and historical inaccuracies have been critiqued by succeeding generations of ever more theoretically savvy eco-critics. The critiques have been largely accurate in terms of identifying Shiva's tendency to assume a natural, or inherent, link between women and an anti-exploitative, "nurturing" relationship with the earth; but their effect has been blunted by the suspicion that marks the relationship of green activists to green theorists. Those who favor "action" over "analysis" tend to dismiss the theorists' critique because the language of theory appears inaccessible, specialized, and pretentious.[40] Specifically, critiques of Shiva's

[40] This mis-communication between activists and academics underscores the need for us to re-tool a synthesis of theory and practice. Anti-theory

"essentializing" rhetoric are countered with questions such as: Why should activists bother to take account of mere rhetorical critiques of their arguments? Aren't activists more concerned with the practical results of their work, rather than with linguistic accuracy or rhetorical elegance? Theorists, for their part, have often failed to demonstrate (or seemed unconcerned with) the practical consequences, or ideological politics, following from particular kinds of theoretical sloppiness. In Shiva's case, two so-called theoretical issues seem worrying in practical ways; they are evidence of a theory-praxis nexus that needs to be addressed dialectically rather than dichotomously. First, it is not just Shiva's model of womanhood that is static and essentialist; science and technology suffer the same fate, and nature itself is rendered sacred (and thus also static; not to be sullied by profane technology). Second, this "rediscovery" of the authentically indigenous "sanctity" of nature brings Shiva uncomfortably close to a traditionalist religious nationalism, with disturbing implications for the kind of communitarianism she envisions. Let us look more closely at these two issues.

Shiva's simple (often simplistic) subsistence model, undergirded by a nature-ethic that seems transcendentalist and romanticist, leaves little room for a detailed critique of capitalism and the relationship of human production to nature. While Shiva certainly opposes corporate ownership of nature, the main villain is "science" per se (rather than a specifically capitalist, or bourgeois science). Shiva sees science and technology as inherently evil, and advocates a return to a pre-technological existence and a subsistence model of production, implying that self-sufficient peasant societies insulated from global trade will automatically be egalitarian and respectful of nature. Such a position is reminiscent of nineteenth-century British romanticists and American

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proponents tend to favor statements such as this quote from the sci-tech listserve: "The next time I see the word problematise, I shall vomit." The writer adds: "…the same goes for 'intervention,' 'contested,' 'totalizing,' and the rest of the postmodernist/postcolonial arsenal of buzzwords." (Post to the sci-tech listserve, in a discussion-thread on Vandana Shiva; <system@CCTR.UMKC.EDU, http://vest.gu.se/vest_mail/sci-tech_1996/0705.html>, Tue, 14 May 1996 18:11:33 CST.) The "problematise" quote is attributed by the writer to "Gloria Steinem on academic feminism in *Mother Jones*, December, 1995.) While it is true that academic discourse often meanders far away from urgent political matters, it is also unfortunate that activists often adopt a problematic anti-intellectualism in their dismissal of all academic discourse as "jargon-filled."

transcendentalists, who could afford to worship a mystical nature only because they could access it via the privilege of their elite social positions. *Left Business Observer* editor Doug Henwood identifies this ideology accurately when he rejects the "elitist asceticism" of anti-globalizing romantics (among whom he includes David Korten, Doug Tompkins, Jerry Mander, and Vandana Shiva). Henwood, noting that "[t]he ecofeminist Vandana Shiva views technology as a male disruption of the sacred woman-nature dyad, and advocates a 'subsistence' economic model," says, bluntly, of the anti-technological anti-globalizers: "[Their] dream of local self-sufficiency is suffocating and reactionary."[41]

Indeed, romantic anti-globalization is often hostile to marxist hopes of appropriating the means of production and transforming the mode of production away from both feudal and capitalist frameworks. Romantic anti-globalizers tend to throw out the baby (the integral connection between human well-being and technological production) with the bathwater (the exploitative social relations and excessive consumption associated with advanced capitalism). As Henwood argues,

> It's evil that Merck will steal plants from indigenous people and then patent them, and be protected for doing so under international trade law, but the plants wouldn't do much good if it weren't for some large, complex organization to develop and process them. Socialize Merck, don't dissolve it.[42]

Romanticist eco-activists would, however, see Henwood as under the thrall of exploitative western Cartesianism, because he wishes to "use" nature anthropocentrically for human benefit, via the "inherently evil" tools of technological production and global organization.

A contradiction thus lurks at the boundaries of many of the anti-globalization coalitions of the 1999-2000 successful season of protest. While romantic anti-globalizers seek refuge in a pre-Enlightenment vision of production relations (seeming to ignore the exploitation

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[41]Doug Henwood, "Antiglobalization," in *Left Business Observer*, 71, January, 1996, <http://www.panix.com/~dhenwood/Globalization.html>; David Korten is author of *When Corporations Rule the World;* Doug Tompkins is President and CEO of the clothing corporation *Esprit* and creator of the Foundation for Deep Ecology (FDE), a neo-Malthusian think-tank; Jerry Mander is a program director for FDE.
[42]Henwood, *op. cit.*

involved in feudal and other closed-communitarian forms of social relations), a more radical marxist critique hopes to enlist a transformed technology in forging new modes of production that foster egalitarian, non-exploitative social relations. Marxist political ecology tends to advocate an internationalist model of global linkage (developed in dialectical relation with local self-sufficiency) over the dream of anti-technological traditionalist local communities (which absolutize and romanticize self-sufficiency rather than putting it in the context of the historical development of internationalism). While both romantic and marxist ecopolitics assume a need to forge a different kind of society, neither side is able to grapple honestly with its contradictions and possibilities when we conflate all forms of eco-political anti-globalization.

Shiva suggests that science and technology (inherently reductionist and unethical) are exclusively a product of western philosophy, and that, conversely, bioethics are natural to the realm of eastern thought. Quoting from the Upanishads, the Dalai Lama, and Tagore, she offers their more "holistic" ideas as evidence that "[c]ompassion and concern for other species is therefore very indigenous to our pluralistic culture."

> [E]thics and values are distinct elements of our cultural identity and our pluralistic civilization. The ancient Ishoupanishad has stated, "The universe is the creation of the Supreme Power meant for the benefit of all creation. Each individual life form must, therefore, learn to enjoy its benefits by farming a part of the system in close relation with other species. Let not any one species encroach upon others rights."[43]

A critique of such "traditionalist" thinking in South Asian environmentalism has already been carried out by a group of three scholars, whose work has not yet received the attention it deserves. I draw on their claims here, in lieu of the longer exercise of comprehensive textual reading. In a careful critical essay in the *Journal of Peasant Studies,* Subir Sinha, Brian Greenberg, and Shubhra Gururani carry out close readings of Indian environmentalism and suggest that Shiva, among other "new traditionalists," offers a revivalist, upper-caste Hindu model for gender and environmental

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[43] Vandana Shiva, reprinted on the Bioethics webpage, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1527/bioethics.html>, April, 2000.

relations.[44] Shiva has drawn for some decades on ancient scriptures for her inspiration, and it might be argued that her positions predate the growth of nationalist Hindu state power in India. However, her continued silence about the political economy of indigenous hierarchies and patriarchies, when placed in the recent historical context of *Hindutva* authenticity and anti-modernity, merits, at the very least, further interrogation. It remains susceptible to, if not already complicit with, a revivalist Indian discourse of growing strength. Yet, rather than interrogation, we have only a zone of surprising silence. Indeed, Shiva's reassertions of inherently eco-friendly indigeneity only grow stronger in the wake of her rapturous reception by Seattle activists.

Less inclined than Shiva to draw mass audiences or attend protests, but widely respected as environmental scholars, are sociologist Ramachandra Guha and ecologist Madhav Gadgil. Taken together, the corpus of their (individual and joint) work practically founded the field of Indian environmental history. Much of this work assumes both that pre-colonial Indian ecology, exemplified by the traditional forest dwelling community, was sustainable for more than 18 centuries, only to be disrupted by the watershed of colonialism. This break is exemplified by the destruction of forest ecosystems (including their human components). Guha and Gadgil read the ancient sociology of India as embodying balance: the caste system, for example, is explained as an adaptation to ecological niches, a sustainable system or resource use that was corrupted by the imbalances of colonial society.

Sinha, Gururani, and Greenberg scrutinize Guha and Gadgil's claims, arguing that their focus on timber felling entails silences about agriculture, livestock, and pre-colonial kingdoms — silences that seriously flaw their scientific and social arguments based on the centrality of colonial forest destruction to India's post-colonial environmental problems. Sinha, et al., point out that both pre-colonial "tradition" and post-colonial "modernity" have "much to answer for in terms of ecological degradation." They argue that a "new traditionalism" has arisen in Indian environmentalist discourse, romanticizing the forest dweller but failing to insist on the need for radically different material

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[44]Subir Sinha, Shubhra Gururani, and Brian Greenberg, "The 'New Traditionalist' Discourse of Indian Environmentalism," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 24, 3, April, 1997.

conditions and social relations.[45] Pluralism might not be as simple as it seems, then, in the new ecotopias of the anti-modernists. Sinha, et al., include Guha and Gadgil among the "new traditionalists," whose political implications for social relations are, they find, opposed to their own more red-green politics of "eco-socialism." Sinha, Gururani, and Greenberg contend that, contrary to the overlapping political claims of "new traditionalism" and of *Hindutva,* "a socially just and ecologically sustainable society will not be created by a return to traditional social-ecological relations or through economic and cultural nationalism."

Provocative and well-supported though their argument was, Sinha, et al.'s 1997 essay did not spark a wide discussion about the political and moral economy of South Asian "new traditionalism" versus "eco-socialism."[46] Nevertheless, their essay provides a complex model of eco-politics that would serve South Asian environmentalists well. Sinha, et al.'s argument demonstrates a specific way in which a grounded history and a materialist politics helps chart a principled course through the contradictions of eco-politics in the context of nationalism and globalization.

More than a decade ago, Guha published a brilliant critical essay on American environmentalism, in which he analyzed the conservative social implications of the American pre-occupation with wilderness.[47] Sinha, et al.'s, 1997 critique seems to initiate an analogous critique of

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[45]*Ibid.* A similar critique was articulated by Paul Greenough in his critique of the traditionalist South Asian "Standard Environmental Narrative" (which he calls S.E.N.). In the "S. E. N.," colonialism marked the descent from the glory days of ecological harmony toward the corrupted unsustainable present (Greenough, "S.E.N.," unpublished manuscript).

[46]Among the positions surveyed, Sinha, et al., are simultaneously the most scholarly and the most politically radical. They seem, then, to exemplify the activist-intellectual concerns that I argue ought to be specifically invoked in environmental discourse. Yet the scholarly complexity of their argument makes it less likely to win audiences in street battles. But given that it is precisely the politics of oppression that is at stake here, I would argue that something is awry with our priorities when we ignore the more complex argument in favor of the simpler one because it supposedly makes for easier mass mobilization. I track the silences and contradictions in the structure of contemporary Indian environmentalist debates not as an academic exercise but as a first step to calling for the working out of these contradictions through both activist and scholarly work.

[47]Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics,* 11, 1, 1989.

the conception of forests (as a harmonious entity comprised of vegetation and indigenous peoples) in Indian environmentalism. By Guha's own account, his 1989 essay elicited wide debate among proponents of wilderness ethics. An analogous debate, with its critical and construct-ive components, would be welcome in South Asian environmentalism. Sinha, et al.'s, critique of traditionalism and romanticism represents a red-green theoretical approach that is informed by local practices of environmental activism.

I turn next to the rejection of romanticist ecopolitical theories from an activist perspective. Putting the debate over "nature" into a historical context certainly lends credence to the claim that multinational agents of globalization are today rehearsing many of the strategies of British colonial control of ecological and intellectual power in its colonies. In recent years a debate has emerged, over the South's ability to appropriate the North's tools. Some grass-roots groups have taken the possibility of ownership to be a potentially empowering one, and are beginning to articulate a narrative in which modernity is co-opted rather than resisted head-on. I term this the "pragmatist" environmentalist position, in the sense that the actors adopt a pragmatic rather than a critical/ideological position with respect to western capitalism, modernity, and Reason.

In particular, one growing activist-academic coalition, the SRISTI-Honey Bee network,[48] takes the view that legal means of privatization can be used to challenge the authority of multinationals to operate within the spaces of traditionally-defined use of medicinal plants. Anil Gupta, SRISTI co-ordinator, argues that environmentalists who assert the incompatibility of indigenous practices with private property are deepening the exploitation of grass-roots innovators, rather than protecting their "freedom" from modernity. This inversion of the narrative of indigenous economies as inherently "free" complicates the

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[48]SRISTI (Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions) has what is possibly the largest database in the world on grassroots innovations. Each entry includes names and addresses of "innovators," individuals or communities. Topics include herbal pesticides, fertilizers, veterinary medicine, farm implements, soil and water conservation, and common property management. SRISTI has been working on setting up a global registration system for grassroots innovation that will link investment (private and public), enterprise, and innovation. *Honey Bee* is a magazine of and for local innovators, published in eight Indian languages.

altruism versus private property story that has more often been set out for western academic audiences.

Although the “new traditionalists” and the “pragmatists” rarely address each other in print, it is instructive to contrast their diametrically opposed positions on preservation of the environment and local knowledge of it. Gadgil and Guha’s argument grows out of their reading of the environmental history of the South Asian sub-continent; Gupta’s grows out of his experience with two grassroots organizations, the Honey Bee network and SRISTI. “Traditionalist” communitarians Gadgil and Guha read the practice of modernity as the thinly-veiled text of neo-colonialism, and argue that we must refuse this new subjugation by rediscovering our egalitarian, eco-friendly roots in ancient models of the village community. Gupta, a “pragmatist” environmentalist, agrees that indigenous knowledge is under threat, but argues that, precisely because of the historical fact of colonial and post-colonial globalization, we cannot afford to contemplate the fantasy of reconstructing isolated, self-sufficient local communities.

What Gadgil and Guha do seem to leave unarticulated is the material basis of the alternate ethics to which they call for a return. Dividing Indian society into the environmentally friendly “ecosystem people” and rapacious, modernizing “omnivores,” they advocate a Gandhian conservation ethic:

> In so far as Gandhism seeks to conserve all that is best in our traditions, it might be called the Indian variant of conservatism, with this significant caveat: that it seeks to conserve not the hierarchy of aristocratic privilege, but the repository of wisdom and meaning vested in ecosystem people.[49]

Gadgil and Guha argue, further, that:

> [P]ower to use natural resources [should] lie not with insensitive and corrupt bureaucracies but with the people who most deeply depend on these resources. Today those in power, the omnivores of India, can successfully pass on the costs of resource abuse and environmental degradation to the masses of ecosystem people, and to ecological refugees....But the self-

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[49]Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995).

> interest of India's ecosystem people is congruent for the most part with the good husbanding of natural resources, at least in their own localities. The real solution for the long-term health of the environment thus lies in passing effective political power to the people.[50]

The questions of which "people" are to have what sort of political power, how we might identify the "most deep" dependence on natural resources, or of how vested repositories of wisdom are to be preserved and evaluated, are not addressed anywhere in Gadgil and/or Guha's prolific output. While Guha and Gadgil make impressive efforts to offer theoretical solutions to the problem of environmental colonialism, they do not offer a grounded explanation of how and why these solutions will improve the situation, nor do they offer evidence that they will address existing local inequalities. Guha and Gadgil undermine their own argument — which has many attractive, progressive elements — by articulating it in idealist (i.e., anti-materialist, non-grounded) terms.

Anil Gupta does not have the theoretical, paradigm-defining reputation of Guha and Gadgil; his publications are mostly reports of the activity of the grass-roots networks he works with, and policy recommendations that follow from these experiences. His model is both aggressively local, in that his examples are drawn from the networks of Gujarati agriculturalists who contribute to the Honey Bee archive of local practice, and unapologetically global, in that he argues for a global market-based engagement with globalization. On the biodiversity-rich, economically poor communities who are viewed, in the alternative discourses (such as in Shiva, Gadgil, Guha), as local ecologists whose anti-market model must be emulated for national survival, Gupta argues that, while these intentions are "noble," this model "seeks to tap knowledge without sufficient reciprocity." Gupta describes the important political/institutional tasks in terms of reorienting educational and research priorities towards more equitable development, modifying the nature of contracts among multinational and local actors so that they ensure participation from the latter, and ensuring fair and just remuneration (through the market system) for commercialization of herbal drugs, pesticides, dyes, and so on. Granting that local values often favor free and open knowledge-sharing, he

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[50]*Ibid.*, p. 189

argues, nevertheless, that it is the activist's task to work at somewhat of a tangent to this tendency:

> Clearly, we cannot conserve diversity by keeping people poor. Studies have shown that many indigenous innovators, whether individuals or communities, do not consider their diversity or knowledge a tradable commodity. Their ethical values motivate them to share their knowledge without expectation of material reward. Consequently, while they remain poor the extractors of their knowledge accumulate wealth. We cannot therefore imply that their superior ethics should legitimize a morality in the market place which justifies the extraction.[51]

The way out of this situation, Gupta argues, is not through a refusal to engage with the global market, but through an assertion of the right to value-addition. Colonial systems of extraction depended for their profits on extracting raw materials cheap from colonies, so that the processes of manufacture, production, and marketing could occur in the metropole, thus keeping the value-additive (and profit-making) elements under metropolitan control.

Gupta's brainchild SRISTI aims to link "green" consumers of the North with "green" producers of the South. He reasons that most production in high risk environments — for example, drought and flood prone regions, hill and forest-fringe regions — is already organic. These are often also regions of high male out-migration, so that there are more women-headed households; there is low literacy, and high poverty, but a richness in local knowledge about uses of biodiversity. But in the absence of international "organic" certification facilities for production and export, and product development and marketing infrastructures, no value is added to production in these contexts. Gupta argues:

> This is one area in which market-based approach to development will work even in the post-GATT world because even under GATT, the policy on no-actionable subsidies provides that in contiguous regions of high unemployment and low per-capita

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[51]Anil K. Gupta, "Must Conservators Remain Poor?" *Seminar*, 438, 1996, p. 51.

income, developmental subsidies will not be actionable under WTO.[52]

Gupta believes that access to western consumer markets for these local populations will provide them with incentives to continue to maintain or foster biodiversity. His assumption here is that local communities are not necessarily or inherently conservationist, but that they have the potential to be so. None of his models will be possible, Gupta concedes, without investment in "capacity building." Education, in his model, must include global networks of institutions, individuals, and social movements; access for grass-roots activists to scientific laboratories; a fund for rewarding creativity and innovation at the grassroots; and institutionalized commitments to sustainability, human rights, gender equality and ethical business practices. This model is very different from the traditionalist vision of dispersed, self-sufficient communities who preserve their own knowledge by striving to protect it from global circuits of knowledge and commerce.

These differences between the traditionalist and pragmatist visions are instructive, and seem to stem from each group's understanding of the power relations, injustices, and productive possibilities that make up the present status quo. Both, it seems, accurately identify constitutive injustices that led to the present predicament of indigenous communities. Colonialism and the capitalist global market did wreak havoc on resource use, as the traditionalists argue; the existence of local hierarchies and unethical business practices today does in fact deny the indigenous innovator entry into a market which is growing rich on his knowledge, as the pragmatists argue. However, if the traditionalists allow the nostalgia for a rosy imaginary past, free of ecological, patriarchal and brahminical violence, to substitute for the more painstaking task of writing detailed materialist histories that acknowledge the contradictions in "indigenous" societies, the pragmatists, by contrast, appear to have a rather benign vision of contemporary global markets. Although impressive in its elaborate infrastructure, its combination of field study and economic practice, and its unwavering concern to give local interests the highest priority, the pragmatist environmentalist model seems to assume that free markets are really "free," and that small entrepreneurs can alter the functioning

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[52]Anil K. Gupta, "Investing in Biological Diversity," in *Proceedings of the OECD International Conference* (Cairns, Australia: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1996), p. 316

of international financial institutions and Northern governments. In the pragmatist's world there would be no forced structural adjustment policies, no manipulation of national policies by multinationals, no corporate subsidies and big business lobbies, no payoffs of indigenous groups in exchange for pharmaceutical corporate rights to their resources, and no hostile takeovers of upstart competitors by global oligopolists.

The traditionalist and the pragmatist model are both important components of oppressed peoples' dreams of liberation. Both have played important, though separate, roles in mobilizing public awareness of the abuses of colonial power, the dangers of commodified knowledge, and the potential strengths of grassroots organizing. Yet, their (mis)readings of global and/or local power skew their predictive efficacy. Further, both these schools of environmentalism are largely silent on the issue of nationalism.

8. A Conclusion

There is, of course, one academic field whose bread and butter are the issues of nationalism, colonialism and post-colonialism, nature and culture, identities, contradictions, and silences — the interdisciplinary field of post-colonial studies. Why have major post-colonial theorists not taken up the critique of neo-colonial technologies of nature, culture, and production, preferring, often, to dwell on the textual analysis of "popular cultural artifacts?"[53] The gap is created, in part by theorists' isolation from the practices of the "locals" they speak about. A more general problem is that the mutually constitutive processes of geo-political domination, technological change, and the systematization of natural-resource extraction have continued to grow more inextricably intertwined while post-colonial studies, though touting interdisciplinarity, has yet to simultaneously problematize the discourses of nature-as-resource, genetics-as-anthropology, communication technology, nation-state geopolitics, and corporate transnationalism. Some of the hesitation on the part of post-colonial theorists to take on not only this tangled web of neo-colonial developments but also to theorize the new forms of resistance to neo-colonialism might stem, first, from a sense of helplessness before the awesome, juggernaut-like power of

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[53]One useful attempt to take up these issues that at least partially locates itself in the discipline of post-colonial studies is K. Sivaramakrishnan and Arun Agarwal, ed., *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representations, and Rule in India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

corporate capital; and second, from a sense that it remains futile, perhaps naive, to believe that the subaltern can speak.[54]

Increasingly, however, it is important to note that "the subaltern" in fact often speaks. In the form of demonstrations in local and global forums, in the form of legal and political initiatives, the hum of dissent has turned into a roar of refusal that has been heard in the corridors of power most dramatically in the period between the anti-WTO November, 1999 protests at Seattle and the anti-IMF April rally in Washington, D.C. But prior to and after these public demonstrations, the subaltern voice has spoken and continues to speak, and, adding to the chants and slogans at protests, her voice has often been digitalized. The subaltern emails, the subaltern makes video documentaries, the subaltern networks from Seattle to Kuala Lumpur.[55] All of these technologies are seen by her, not as sites for the information-satiated, post-industrial consumer to plug into virtual identities, but, rather, as politicizable technologies that enable local groups to share information with transnational support networks. The average third world activist group does not have easy access to internet hookups or video cameras; however, as multinational penetration of local space accelerates, the options for purely localized resistance are diminishing, and the internet offers in many instances the best hope of mounting rapid, co-ordinated global resistance to neo-colonial incursions.

As members of a global world in flux, we are presented now with the opportunity of being able to participate in some of these resistances as they are forming. Academics might begin to contribute to a new conjunction of theory and practice by simultaneously bringing to bear their reading skills in critiquing global cyberculture's recycling of

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[54]Gayatri Spivak's essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), warned scholars away from naive or opportunistic academic radicalism, and stressed the inevitability of reading supposedly authentic voices through their multiple ideological refractions.

[55]Grassroots activists and writers like Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar, and Gail Omvedt disseminate information alerts and develop support for petitions via the internet. The Kayapo in Brazil and the Zapatistas in Chiapas have used video cameras to great effect in raising international awareness of their struggle. At the Seattle anti-WTO demonstrations, one of the most effective organizers was the Malaysia-based NGO, Third World Network.

colonial tropes while also actively appropriating, co-opting or subverting corporate-controlled cyberspace in order to bend it to subaltern needs.

The coalitions of academics, lawyers, and activists that are now being cobbled together in resistance to the globalization of neo-liberal, neo-colonial trade policies represent a form of subaltern resistance that we ought not to leave to the philosophers to theorize, the armchair environmentalists to romanticize, or the entrepreneurs to commercialize. We need to combine our theoretical skills with an understanding of the legal and geo-political issues at stake, while imaginatively participating in the reconfiguration of resistant spaces within the transnational networks that have been for too long dominated by the colonial and neo-colonial technocratic designers of knowledge. It is time for scholars, too, to go beyond the model of third-world-native as inherently eco-friendly, collectively egalitarian, and incommensurably separate, toward a model that sees Third Worlders as capable of fighting on the agonistic terrain of globalization for stakes that are not dissimilar to those of workers and marginalized populations in the west. South Asian environmentalism is rich in talent — scholars, activists, lawyers, journalists, and filmmakers have all taken up the urgent issues of development, displacement, self-determination, and sustainability. If we spent less time vying for a piece of the western capitalist pie, and found more ways of engaging with each others' differences and speaking across the walls of silence which presently separate our diverse perspectives, then we might really have nothing to lose but our chains.