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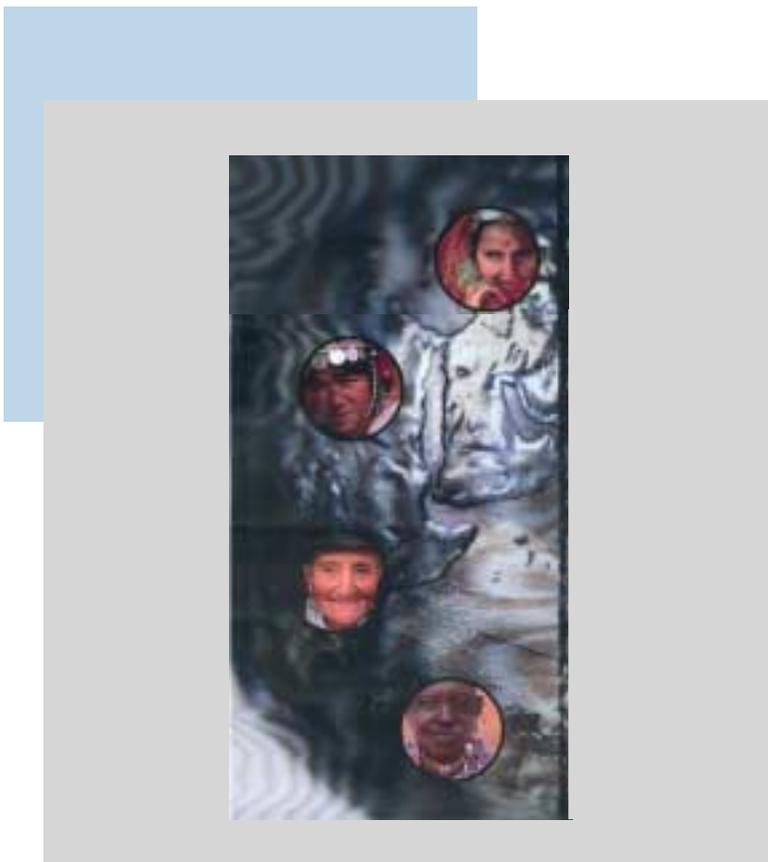
**Woman with altitude**  
Age  
8 March 1995

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Based on the most current debates in anthropology, geography, ecology, feminist theory, and development studies, the CD ROM presents a conceptual framework and tool kit that may guide academics, activist, and policy-makers in re-visioning the worlds that women are defending or creating alongside, despite, and beyond globalization.

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**“Politics , Culture and Justice:  
Women and the Politics of Place”  
International Workshop of the Society for  
International Development (SID)**

**Eugene (USA), University of Oregon, CTTT,  
3-6 April 2002**



**Members of the Project “Power, Culture, Identity: Women & the Politics of Place”, July 2002**

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## Politics, Culture and Justice - Women and the Politics of Place

Women throughout the world are using their own knowledge and experiences to create new and distinct places. They demonstrate that even in a globalized world, place is still important to the way people know and experience life.

What we aim to document in this leaflet is what is new in globalization for women's experience of place, taking "place" as a potentially transformative site of political practice. The focus is on how "women's place-based politics" is effecting social change by creating and providing new ways of thinking about culture, identity and rights in today's world, where nothing is purely local or global.



The leaflet builds on the results of the international workshop 'Politics, Culture and Justice: Women and the Politics of Place', organized by SID. It also builds on the articles of the SID's *Development* journal issue 'Place, Politics and Justice: Women Negotiating Globalization', which was launched at the workshop, held at the Centre for Critical Theory and Transnational Studies (CTTT), University of Oregon, 3-6 April 2002.



Participants of the Eugene workshop

Source: Wendy Harcourt

## "Politics of place" - Websites

### National Racism-Free Zone Project Institute

<http://www.jefferson.lane.edu>  
The National Racism Free Zone movement, originally developed, 1981, for secondary schools, started in Eugene, Oregon in an attempt to insure a safe and culturally healthy environment for all ethnic groups. It is its aim to end hate and discrimination based on skin colour, socio-economic status and lifestyle.

### The Community Economies Project

<http://www.communityeconomies.org>  
This project elaborates a more diverse economy in which alternative economic activities are valued alongside more mainstream capitalist activities. It also seeks to make visible the economic contribution of groups who are often seen as outside "the economy"; such as retrenched workers, unemployed young people, sole parents and retired people.

### PCUN (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United)

[www.pcun.org](http://www.pcun.org)  
PCUN, founded 1985, is Oregon's union of farmworkers, nursery and reforestation workers: Oregon's largest Latino organization. Its fundamental goal is to empower farmworkers to understand and take action against systematic exploitation.

### ODAG (Organisation for Alternative Development & Global Justice)

[www.odag.org](http://www.odag.org)  
It is an Arab virtual NGO, concerned with the search of efficient theories and practices for more equitable, peaceful and just socio-economic development. It works for the integration of local and regional pursuits with an international network of individuals and organizations.

### ZaWoN (Zanzibar Women on the Net)

[www.zitec.org/zawon](http://www.zitec.org/zawon)  
This organization is dedicated to facilitating and encouraging the use of new communication and information technology among women's grassroots groups concerned with development in Zanzibar. The organization provides a space for sharing and disseminating information on economic, social and political issues.

### Lokayan

<http://education.vsnl.com/lokayan/>  
Lokayan, meaning 'Dialogue of the people', started in 1980. It has sought to evolve a systematic critique of the established models of development and the state, and also to promote political action drawing upon the large variety of micro-initiatives that are engaged in the struggle for a just society.

### DMSC (Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee), India

<http://www.durbarmahila.org/>

### The Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP)

<http://www.nswp.org>  
The NSWP was formed in 1991. It consists of sex workers and organizations, which promote sex workers health and human rights and provide services to sex workers in over 40 countries.

### Sex Workers' Outreach Project (Australia)

<http://www.swop.org.au/>

### DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era)

[www.dawn.org.fj](http://www.dawn.org.fj)  
DAWN was established in 1984 as a network of women scholars and activists from the economic South who engage in feminist research and analysis of the global environment and are committed to working for economic justice, gender justice and democracy.

This leaflet is the outcome of the Society for International Development (SID) project "Power, Culture, Identity: Women and the Politics of Place", supported by the Rockefeller Foundation.

## Defending place: Women in Palestine

*It is the lack of recognizing the place, history, memory and attachment that is the main source of violence to both Palestinian Arabs and Jews within Israel.*

(Randa Farah)

The shadow of the Palestinian situation of early April was felt throughout the meeting in Eugene. One of the project members, Nahda Younis Sh'ada, living and doing research in Gaza after many years of activism, decided not to join the meeting in Eugene, even though she had managed to get her visa. Already in February she felt that it was too critical a situation to leave her children.

During the meeting she was e-mailing to the group about the situation.

*Dear friends,  
Yes, it is another Beirut, ... It is more difficult today in Rammala ... People are not allowed to leave their houses... Some doctors are giving husbands instructions on the phone on how to deliver their wives...*

*And yet, the world is still watching. I really do not know what to ask you to do. How can a group of protesters stand up against a super power?*

*... one can't afford to be miserable, upset or frustrated. We have a long list of obligations. We have to prepare a 'place' based committees here in Gaza. We have to distribute first aid equipment in the*

*camp. We have to exchange phone numbers of doctors and expected delivering mothers. ... We have to keep our files somewhere on the Net. You may know that Banks were destroyed, some women's organizations, NGOs, international organizations' offices (including UN, British council office) have been destroyed. diskettes, cds, books, and files were thrown from windows.*

*... What you can do is to raise your voice, louder and louder and much, much louder than their tanks and helicopters. This new world order is promising a total hell for us.*

*Salam, Peace to all of you  
Nahda Younis Sh'ada*

- Date: Thu, 04 Apr 2002 15:52:05

Palestinian women defend and reproduce notions of 'women,' 'home' and 'homeland' to contribute to the dialogue on women's role in carving, defending and re-appropriating places. In their struggle 'against forgetting' the Palestinian identity, they played a significant role in reconstructing the memory and passing it on to younger generations by telling stories about the 'home' in Palestine and the activities they carried out in their daily lives.

To that end, they played an important role in re-inscribing refugee camps, as Palestinian places and in opposition to humanitarian practices and policies, the objectives of which are to maintain the camp as a 'humanitarian space':

## Why women, why place?

*The ethical and political imperative is to restore agency and capacity to localities.*  
(Julie Graham)

In mainstream and critical debates alike, globalization is presented as an all-encompassing economic and cultural phenomenon with no possible alternatives. The global is seen as necessarily where power resides while the local-concrete places, alternative economic models, regional identities- is left with the pathetic choice of either adapting or perishing. In this view the local seems to be subsumed and contained by the global, not so much acting as acted upon.

In the face of this positioning, the vision of 'Politics of Place' project presented in this leaflet is not just to

adjust to a global capitalist economy but actively to construct a community economy in the face of globalization, where different ways to be economically are possible.

Such a project requires a strategic and ethical process of working on the local subject, producing ourselves and helping to produce others as subjects rather than objects of development; as agents rather than victims of globalization. We need to ask and examine more closely how women can carve out spaces of empowerment within and through place-based politics.

*In today's world, places are no longer isolated, nor are they pure, static, or just traditional. Places are clearly made and affected by their encounters with global processes.*  
(Wendy Harcourt)

*There are differing possibilities concerning the strategies that might foment or 'defend' place-based politics, cultures, and economies both in-and-against the pull of the totalizing global.* (Sonia Alvarez)



Dancing Women, Ghana

Source: C. Beckwith, A. Fisher, Robert Estall  
Picture Library

## Understanding place

*Place is not an 'authentic' locality, but a locus of struggle.* (Arturo Escobar)

Our concept of women's place-based politics refers to the various political activities carried out by women around the body, the environment, the community and the public arena. Looking at the increasing number of women's political organizations it is obvious that places are still consequential for women's lives and that the struggle over place continues.

## There are four domains of political struggle related to place:

### The body:

Women's bodies are the first place where women are engaged in political struggle like fights for autonomy, for reproductive and sexual integrity and rights, for safe motherhood, for freedom from violence and sexual oppression. Women's bodies can become at times the only place to make their needs, sufferings and joys visible.

*"We carry inside our bodies  
the places we are from,  
and they carry our imprint."  
Dianne Ruckebell*

### The home:

Serves paradoxically as both a safe space where women have considerable power as well as a site where they experience a great degree of violence and where they isolate themselves. Not only is it where many relations of power (within the family) are negotiated, it is also where much vital but undervalued labour is produced. The nuclear family has a tendency to suppress rather than encourage the enormous diversity of human desires. If 'family life' would not be considered as the only one possible normalised option, maybe fewer people would be discursively constructed as 'deviants' and less social conflict would occur.



Source: Pakistan, Aurat Foundation, 1991

## Challenging 'place': Leaving home

*The complicated relationships migrant prostitutes have to 'home', which may or may not be a place they wish to visit or actually live in again, are excluded from discussions about them.* (Laura Agustín)

As soon as people migrate, there is a tendency to sentimentalize their home. Warm images are evoked of close families, simple household objects, rituals, songs and foods. In this context, migration is constructed as a desperate move and migrants as *deprived* of the place they 'belong to'.

Yet for millions of people all over the world, the birth and childhood place is not a feasible or desirable one in which to undertake more adult or ambitious projects, and moving to another place is a conventional -not traumatic- solution.

Migrant sex workers are not always forcibly displaced, and even when they are, their trajectories after leaving home can, and often do, lead

*Equality of Vulnerability? I'm not sure  
we're all in the same boat.* (Arif Dirlik)



Source: A. Warhol

them into positive outcomes (meeting new and interesting people, finding their 'place in the world').

Very often the discourse of solidarity sets up a dichotomy about 'place' for migrants which consists of:

- home (which you loved and were forced to leave); and
- Europe/America the place you arrive (which you don't want to be deported from).



## Women's experiences of Displacement

*Place can be some place you come from as well as somewhere to go or something you make.* (Dianne Rocheleau)

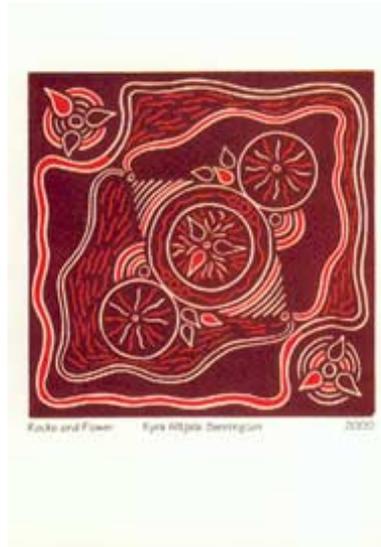
While arguing for the validity of place-based politics, we must also take into account the myriad paradoxes, challenges and ambivalences that arise within and on the fringes of place. We cannot ignore the fact that there is no such thing as a 'pure' or easily definable place.

We must address the paradoxes, challenges and conceptual and practical needs that arise because of the unprecedented number of people that are forced -or choose- to leave home and place - the migrants, sex workers, displaced people, refugees, even the victims of natural disasters. They require us to take into account the tensions between movement and attachment, displacement and re-construction, identity and belonging that many people live with.

- How can women's group effectively pursue a transformative politics?
- How can they create a politics, that includes the cultural autonomy of her traditional community, while reserving her right to make changes to it?
- How can women create or move in a new and currently unrecognized, undefined place?

What are the effects of placelessness?

*Parts of finding my place are always finding out how to deal with my family culture, my ethnic culture. There are things I don't want to keep.* (Guadalupe Quinn)



Rocks and Flower

*Place can turn into a space (spaces) of recognition, positive spaces. To construct spaces of equity you need to recognize boundaries.* (Libia Grueso)

### The environment:

*People are embodied within larger living bodies: the environment.* (Dianne Rocheleau)



Henri Rousseau: The Dream: 1910, Museum of Modern Art N.Y.

Is understood as a multi-layered web of economic, political and social relations that define women's surroundings. As such it is connected to all aspects of survival: to issues of livelihood, justice and quality of life. The environment is intimately enmeshed in and shaped by gender relations. Women, as care givers, home makers and more grounded in place are often more directly affected by environmental destruction than men.

### The social public space:

*Places as an urgency of pinching into the private and then translating it into the public.* (Marisa Belausteguigoitia)

It the male-dominated domain where political decisions are made and to which most women still have limited access. For many years, women's

movements have been creating diverse avenues for entry into that space. In redefining what counts as political, and at the heart of the politics of place, is an implicit challenge and renegotiation for what is discussed and valued in public.

The conflicts that women are experiencing within the different domains usher in new forms of cultural and political relations. Our place-based perspective suggests that transformative political change best happens when women are able to act in all four domains of place.



Source: WEP International, Rotterdam

## The Politics of Organizing in and Around Place

*The issue of the project is rootedness: if alliances are not rooted in specific places they become irrelevant. (Fatma Alloo)*

Women across the world are involved in what we have defined as 'place-based' politics, movements of resistance to mainstream politics and development in women's everyday lives, centred round the body, the household, the environment and the community.

*It's not wrong to want to help—  
But important to highlight dangers of helping in the wrong way.*

These small groups do not work in isolation. Rather, they engage in dynamic vertical and horizontal networking, connecting among themselves and with others in places far and close, across cultural, political, racial and ethnic divides.

As actors in their own lives, women are leading place-based activities, forming meshworks and creating new partnerships. They are working together towards greater equity, respecting and working with cultural and other differences. Such strategies could well repudiate dominant development in the name of the defence of place, creating new structures of power and new forms of culture.



Women's community in Ghana, 1999

Source: Wendy Harcourt

Looking at the debates on women, the environment and sustainable development in the last decade you will find fascinating examples of women:

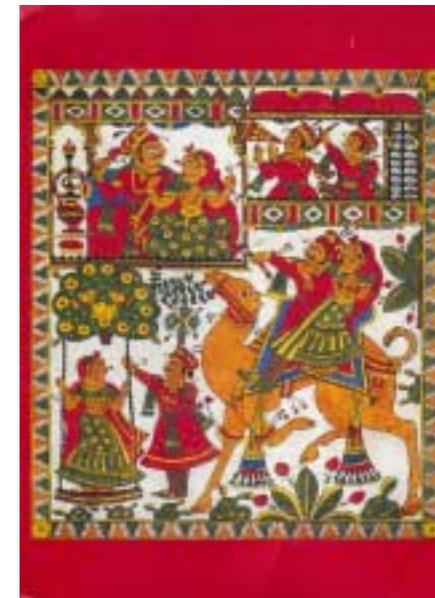
- carving political spaces that challenges the hegemonic institutions of the state and market;
- criticizing, as members of the so-called 'third actor' in the modern *polis* - civil society, the traditional economic development model;
- estimating environment, including the meanings, values and general ways of being that characterize and distinguish between different communities.

*The positive promise of ethnicity lies not in a 'return to the tribe' or the mere 'revival' of a particular culture. It lies instead, in the building of a social order which celebrates diversity and organic unity, and is organized around principles of equality, justice, peace, and dignity as the new social movements are redefining these concepts in a new framework of social context and intellectual search. (Smitu Kothari).*

movements critique existing inequities and injustices while regenerating their own communities and cultures.

Given several generations of class, caste, culture and religious identity relations as well as the imposition of external systems of power and hegemony, a return to some ideal community is obviously not what is being defended here.

For us, the most exciting aspect of trying to understand the emerging movements and processes of grassroots governance is that communities are redefining themselves and undergoing their own transformation as they reaffirm their own spaces and relate with national and/or the global forces. These peasant and ecological



Epic on canvas

Source: CRY, Mumbai

## Reconfiguring Environment: Place and Social Movements

*'Convivencia' means not only 'to coexist' but also to share 'vivencias', which is the experiencing of living.* (Lourdes Arizpe)

Many of today's environmental movements struggle for the defence of place, and for historical reasons women are often located at the forefront of these struggles. There is a mutually beneficial convergence between women's and environmental movements, a synergy and enrichment that finds a meeting ground in place. Both of them want:

- to connect different groups of people, other species, artifacts (houses, gardens) and the surrounding physical world;
- to mediate between local and larger places, both earthly and spiritual;
- not to treat places as real estate, as exchangeable and interchangeable commodities;
- but to recognize place as the ground where body, home, community and habitat are joined in everyday experience as well as in history;

- to assert that place is both: social and biological, natural and cultural;
- to stress that place, moreover, is the space of integration of these different dimensions (body, home, community and environment).

We suggest that this is a useful vantage point from which to understand many contemporary social movements for the defense of place. This means that they are struggles over the natural and social conditions of existence, over place as an integrating instance of these conditions.



TURTLES CARRYING A  
COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF  
A NATION ARRIVES BUT  
NEVER WHEN WE ANTICIPATE  
IT.

(Marisa Belausteguigoitia)

## Women's Networking and Alliance Building

*It is much more realistic to think that local empowering movements can lead to major transformations. Such movements can be successful by working through networks.* (Lourdes Arizpe)

### Networks:

The concept of network is central to processes of globalization. Using global networks such as the Internet and transnational NGOs enables place-based movements exchanges of information, support, solidarity and the sharing of experiences to participate more integrally in the reshaping of global processes. Most resistance networks operate partially through, or at least by engaging with, dominant networks.

*'What are different forms of networking and communication that women have used historically to build 'meshworks'? Cloth, art, music, email, pictures, drumming, dance.'*

Body, Place, Space and Community, they seem to be intertwined with one another in a way that makes them almost inseparable. One of the reasons for this may be their dialectically changing relationship as the temporal making and breaking of borders through narratives, discourses, networks, meshworks, and practices take place.

### Meshworks:

Meshworks are non-hierarchical and self-organizing networks that grow in unplanned directions. They involve two parallel dynamics: strategies of localization and of interweaving. They are simultaneously engaging with dominant networks and retaining their characteristic plurality. Meshworks are not necessarily 'morally superior' to dominant networks or hierarchies, but they do tend to be oppositional.

### Cyberworlds:

Women network regionally, nationally and internationally using the Internet as a cheap and accessible tool to advance their concerns. They enter the cyberspace to connect different places and to create a new politics emanating from place.



African-American youth group

Source: Wendy Harcourt

## Fleshy Politics

*Flesh doesn't just get sexed, it also gets hungry...need to reembody the body outside of sex...it includes things like suffering, like torture. (Sandi Morgen)*

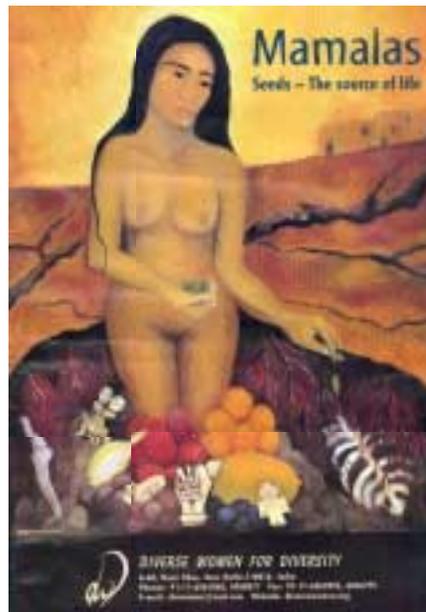
In a world where dominant discourses and practices continuously abuse and marginalize women via their physical and socially constructed bodies, the political defense of place has to focus also on the struggle for women's freedom and right to bodily integrity, autonomy, knowledge and identity.

By focusing on the bodies closest-in, their flesh and blood and pain, collective 'bodies' out there – that is, how women are discursively constructed – cannot so easily be denuded of their materiality, and therefore so easily overlooked. In calling attention to bodies as political subjects, we recognize that 'we are our bodies.'

*Bodies are in Places. Places are also in our Bodies...Body as entry point, destabilizes, disrupting in order to transform. Go to the body for its transformative potential. (Yvonne Underhill-Sem)*

The body therefore is understood as:

- a subject, central to power, gender and culture;
- linked integrally to material expressions of community and public space and not as bound to the private or to the self;
  - a political place that mediates the lived experiences of social and cultural relationships;
  - part of social, cultural and political institutions and participation;
  - our corporeal, fleshly, material existence, which is determining our relations;
- a conscious and material entry point to the political identity of women.

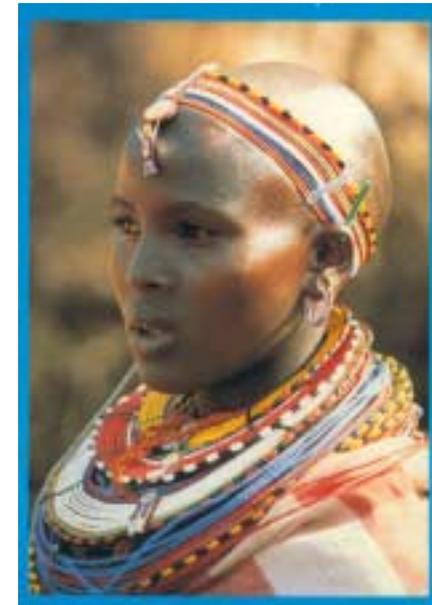


Source: Valentina Campos

## Aims of the body politics

*Bodies are in Places. Places are also in our Bodies...By focussing on the body 'closest-in'-its flesh and blood and pain and more - collective bodies "out-there" cannot so easily be denuded of their materiality and therefore dismissed. In calling attention to the body closest-in, we recognise bodies as political subjects, discursively constructed yet always able to be "pinched". (Yvonne Underhill-Sem)*

- free women from violence;
- guarantee autonomy and control of the body;
- enable them choices throughout the life stage;
- move away from repressive technological intervention and away from medicalized concepts of the female body;



Masai Woman

Source: Sapra M.M., Nairobi

- recognize the intersection of women productive and reproductive lives in terms of well-being at the economic, social and cultural level;
- help women to reject being treated as sexualized subjects.

The political self is not distinct from the body; it is only through particular ideological and historical processes that bodily experiences and activities have been removed from political discourse. What is needed is a position that allows bodies and places to be both grounded and materially pinchable but also to be fluid and discursively constituted.

*Are cow-girls made in Montana or in Maasailand? Can they make themselves in both places?*

(Dianne Rocheleau)