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Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Bioprospecting/Biopiracy An Ecofeminist Perspective on Biopiracy in Latin America

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Comparative Perspectives Symposium: Bioprospecting/Biopiracy

An Ecofeminist Perspective on Biopiracy in Latin America

This essay develops an ecofeminist subsistence analysis of biopiracy in Latin America. This perspective understands the current triumphant neoliberal agenda as a continuation of a long history of capitalist, patriarchal, and racist colonization of women, peasants, indigenous peoples, land, and nature. So much of the accumulated capital was expropriated from these groups that a great deal of what counts as economic growth has been and continues today to be simply the transfer of local and communal wealth into external markets. Their subsistence production is both necessary to capital and necessary to their own survival and is taken through capitalist patriarchal violence.

Ecofeminists Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies (1999) argue that women's household labor, peasants, indigenous products, and nature's gifts are made invisible by being naturalized. They also observe how colonial peasants and indigenous peoples are "housewifed" (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, 16), treated as feminine workers—unpaid or poorly paid. Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies have formulated their subsistence perspective as the precondition for: the survival and regeneration of life on the planet as a whole; self-determination within the limits of necessity; a new way of life in all its dimensions (economy, culture, society, politics, language, etc.), each without separation from the others; historical connectedness that exists, through colonization and development, between the industrial and nonindustrial world; security, freedom, autonomy, self-determination, and the preservation of the economic and ecological base as well as cultural and biological diversity for the victims of the war against subsistence; and continuity between nature and history (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999, 19–20). The subsistence perspective also expresses the viewpoint of women and men engaged in a daily struggle to survive for themselves, their families, and their communities.

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