

Can ecofeminism really offer anything new, or is it merely a generic heading for the more meaningful and explicit analyses engendered by faithful and comprehensive criticism from established theoretical perspectives? I want to hear the editors' answers to their precise question: "Does ecofeminism make sense, and can it be effective in concrete, complex situations?"

TANGLED ROUTES: WOMEN, WORK AND GLOBALIZATION ON THE TOMATO TRAIL

Deborah Barndt
Aurora: Garamond Press, 2002

REVIEWED BY JAN KAINER

Inspired by the tomato as the central subject of her analysis of the North American food system, Deborah Barndt's book describes in vivid detail the intricate path of the commodified tomato from the agricultural fields of the South to the fast-food restaurant and supermarket of the North. As the story of the tomato unfolds, we are shown the complex interconnections between the environmental, economic and social processes that make up the transnational food chain. We learn about the ecological degradation of tomato "production," the position of working women in growing and selling the tomato under conditions of industry and labour market restructuring, and the interrelationship between production and consumption in the global food chain. From the growth of seedlings, to picking and sorting, to transporting tomatoes North to sell in hamburgers at McDonald's and on supermarket shelves in Loblaw's, Barndt shows us how globalization really operates. We are presented with

a coherent account of how the North American food system affects workers, the environment, the food we eat, our eating patterns, as well as broader economic developments such as the organization of transnational and regional economies in an era of trade liberalization.

Taking us back to pre-colonial times, we learn that the *tomatl* was grown by indigenous people, the Mayan and the Aztec, long before the days of Christ. Referred to as the "love apple," the tomato was eventually exported to Europe and incorporated into Italian and Spanish cuisine. The colonial period is for Barndt one "moment" among many in the historical processes that contributed to the political, economic, and ideological forces leading up to the present day genetically modified, corporate, global tomato. The other "moments" include the industrial moment under capitalism, the genetic moment and neo-liberalism, and the computer moment and globalization. By analyzing the tomato "across space and through time," the author explores the historical changes in agricultural "production" that emerged from pre-colonialism to the present.

By connecting the ecological with the social in chapter 2, Barndt uncovers blatant contradictions in the tomato food chain. While the tomato is abused ecologically by fertilizers, toxic pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides, in addition to being genetically modified, cosmetically the tomato is treated with the greatest of care. In preparation for the supermarket, tomatoes are washed in highly chlorinated water, blow-dried, waxed and polished. They are temperature controlled, weighed, inspected for pesticides and handled deftly by their packers. This tender treatment of the tomato contrasts sharply with the severe environmental conditions in which the fruit is grown, but more importantly, it diverges completely with the harsh labour conditions of peasants working in the agricultural fields of Mexico or those of fast-food and supermarket

workers in Canada. Barndt elaborates on the life and work of these employees in chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6. Each chapter is a case study profiling a different link on the tomato trail.

Beginning with the "consumption end" of the food chain Barndt analyses the fast-food experience of consumers and workers at McDonald's. This transnational company is a powerful symbol of everything that is negative about economic globalization. McDonald's epitomizes American cultural hegemony of consumerism and typifies common cultural experiences of food consumption in which "food is more symbolic and cultural than material and physical." Moreover, McDonald's managerial practices that emphasize efficiency, rationality and labour flexibility have come to dominate corporate thinking worldwide. Both McDonald's and Loblaw's rely on feminized, and youthful, flexible labour to meet intermittent customer demand. Barndt's interviews with food workers reveal a drastic change in eating patterns—instead of family meal times, food is eaten on the run to accommodate shifting work schedules and erratic social lives, a pattern that reinforces fast-food consumption.

After discussing corporate food consumption in the North, Barndt moves to an analysis of the migrant workers involved in the transportation and harvest of tomatoes in the South. A fluid picture of migrant workers crossing borders to seek employment immediately emerges. Truck driver, Humberto, and agricultural picker, Irena, spend long periods away from their home in Mexico travelling North to Canada to work. Agricultural companies are also on the move seeking low-wage, flexible labour and a "sunflower" climate ideal for growing food. Like corporate food companies in the North, agribusinesses locate in Mexico to take advantage of flexible feminine labour, but this time indigenous women with children are housed in deplorable conditions and

paid by the piece to pick fruits and vegetables. As these migrant workers move from harvest to harvest they resemble a "moving maquila," a development that has intensified under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

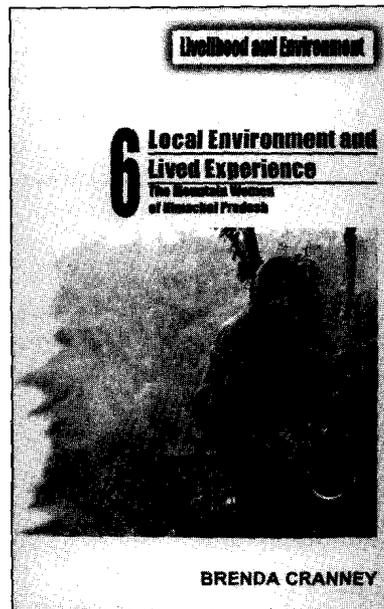
Barndt concludes *Tangled Routes* with stories of resistance which she calls "the other globalization." Here we are offered a comparative look at the different oppositional responses by women to economic globalization, and we are introduced to new possibilities for developing alternatives to the global food system.

Barndt certainly provides food for thought and there is much to chew on in this book. Its sweeping overview of a transnational food system displays interconnections and interrelationships among workers, consumers, environmentalists, corporate capital, and the state. Geographic borders are crossed, we leap across historical time and space as well as traverse disciplinary boundaries by engaging in Marxist political economy, social ecofeminism, sociological labour process theory, feminist ecological economics and feminist environmentalism. The many conceptual threads and intellectual forays make this book, at certain times, too eclectic and lacking in disciplinary rigour, a point the author herself recognizes. Although challenging intellectually, the book remains accessible to undergraduate readers. Each chapter can be read on its own and the array of photo essays, competently produced by the author, vividly portray the real life experiences of workers on the tomato trail.

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT AND LIVED EXPERIENCE: THE MOUNTAIN WOMEN OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

Brenda Cranney
Delhi: Sage Publications, 2001

REVIEWED BY PAMPA MUKHERJEE



While much has been written on issues of environmental degradation, resource depletion, or on women and development, one rarely finds detailed work on how rural environment impacts on the everyday life of people in general and mountain women in particular. Subjected to patriarchal norms and the harsh terrain in which they live, the impact of environmental degradation is felt all the more severely by mountain women. Dependent on their immediate environment, the life of "pahari" women is woven around making provisions for fuel, fodder and water for the household.

The limited availability, difficult access to or total absence of these basic requirements due to natural calamity or as a consequence of inap-

propriate development policies makes the already arduous life of mountain women even more stressful, affecting their work, health and existing lifestyle. Researcher and activist, Brenda Cranney provides a detailed insight into the everyday life of mountain women of Himachal Pradesh. She explores and unfolds in a lucid and persuasive manner her "lived experience" with the women of Ichasser and Dev Nagar, the two villages of Himachal Pradesh where she conducted her study.

The book under review, based on her doctoral work, allows the reader an insight into the inner world and existence of "pahari" women and how the degradation of environment and capitalist transformation has negatively impacted their lives, thus laying bare the hidden truths about their struggle and resistance. It informs the reader as to how "the degradation of environment, land fragmentation, the erosion of subsistence economy by unsustainable and inappropriate development or maldevelopment in Ichasser and Dev Nagar has, in fact resulted in fragmentation of the social fabric of the family and the community."

What makes the book interesting is the manner in which Cranney narrates her experiences, involving an element of story telling. Using a mixed writing style consisting of both diary format and regular writing, the author takes the reader along to experience the everyday life, emotional upheavals, and deep involvement of simple Himachali women with whom she lived, worked, and developed a life-time relationship. Its rigorous methodological application adds depth to the work, combining oral histories, personal interviews, photographs and participant observation, thereby developing an approach that cuts across the disciplines of sociology and anthropology.

Chapters two and three of the book detail the choice of her methodological tools, how her research focus shifted from macro to micro