

# Subsistence Trade Versus World Trade Gendered Class Struggle in Kenya, 1992-2002

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*L'inclusion de l'agriculture dans les Ententes commerciales et les tarifs (GATT) en 1992 et l'insertion de cette entente dans l'Organisation mondiale du commerce (OMC) en 1995 ont placé le commerce des denrées produites pour subvenir aux besoins locaux et le commerce mondial sur un parcours conflictuel à travers le monde. Les auteures assurent que pendant que l'OMC et les fonctionnaires du Kenya implantaient les politiques du commerce mondial pour bloquer l'expansion des petites fermes autonomes, au même moment ils incitaient les dépossédés à la résistance, non seulement au Kenya mais face aux activistes anticorporatifs à l'échelle mondiale.*

The inclusion of agriculture in the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1992 and the institutionalization of this agreement in the World Trade Organization in 1995 have put subsistence trade and world trade on a collision course throughout the world. This is no less the case in Kenya, where global corporate rule and its violent enforcement have ushered in a new cycle of struggle. This new upsurge embraces most of the issues central to the Kenya Land and Freedom Army, or Mau Mau, which won Kenya its independence from Britain in 1963. On the one hand, corporate rule has led the foreign capitalists and African homeguards who enforce commodified production and trade into confrontation with those who are exploited and dispossessed in the process. On the other hand, the world trade regime has clarified two distinct positions among the dispossessed who turn to subsistence pro-

duction and trade in greater numbers as the commodified economy fails to allow most to survive. The two positions among the dispossessed are (i) the valorization of subsistence trade as the basis for resistance and the creation of a new society; and (ii) the resentful reliance on subsistence as a fall-back because there is no land for the landless and no jobs for the jobless until real power can be obtained through participation in the money economy. These two positions can be found within the growing movement of land occupation. Land poor and landless people are now engaged in the reappropriation of land which has been expropriated from them over the past decades.

The aim of this article is to trace the immediate history of the valorization of subsistence. We define subsistence as that which serves life as opposed to profit. Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies have an expansive vision of subsistence:

The concept of self-provisioning is, in our opinion, far too limiting because it refers only to the economical dimension. Subsistence encompasses concepts like moral economy, a new way of life in all its dimensions: economy, culture, society, politics, language *etcetera*, dimensions which can no longer be separated from each other. (19)

We argue that subsistence trade offers an alternative to world trade. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Kenyan functionaries implementing world trade policies stand in the way of the expansion of subsistence trade. But at the

same time they supply a framework which organizes the dispossessed to resist, not only with others in Kenya but with anti-corporate activists internationally. Further, there are distinctive gendered class dynamics among the dispossessed and between the exploited and their exploiters. That is, we can see that dispossessed women are more likely to valorize subsistence and to maintain the skills, knowledge, and collectivity necessary to accomplish the sustenance of entire communities. Some dispossessed men align with them in gendered class alliances to resist corporate enclosure and to elaborate subsistence. Other dispossessed men, however, and some women as well, associate subsistence with dirt and poverty and therefore distance themselves from the pursuit of subsistence production and trade in favour of the much deeper poverty of the money economy. Those who resentfully rely on subsistence may align their interests with those of

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capital, and enter into male deals. It is through male deals that husbands, businessmen, and politicians channel the products of the labour of women and poorer men into the world market.

Thus, in the new millennium new ethnic affiliations are being formed within Kenya and across its borders;

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and a gendered class struggle takes the form of land occupation rooted in direct action. We unravel one thread in this history, leading us from Freedom Corner in 1992 to the village of Kamae in 1998, through the emergence of Muungano Wa Wanavijiji (Organization of Villagers), one of the many organizations key to the valorization of subsistence trade in the twenty-first century. Muungano wa Wanavijiji is a movement with approximately 10,000 members, all of whom are land-poor slum dwellers, or urban villagers. The self-organized congregation is distinctive for its multi-ethnic membership, women's prominence, and their militant, non-violent, direct action tactics in defence of urban villagers' and market traders' land rights. Muungano members trace their political roots back to Mau Mau. They trace their current landlessness to Kenyatta's betrayal of the Mau Mau objective of land for all.

## Historical Background

Before proceeding to a discussion of direct action at Freedom Corner, we need to consider pre-colonial social organization and the gendered class conflicts arising in the first 50 years of the twentieth century. The information presented in this section provides a background to the continuing involvement of women in the defence of the subsistence political economy.

One measure of the racist ideology that emerged from and underlay British imperialism was the dismissal of indigenous agricultural methods as backward and unscientific by British settlers and agricultural officers. Colonialists' opinion of African agriculture rationalized their alienation of African land for the cultivation of export cash crops. The colonial dismissal of African agricultural knowledge, along with the expropriation of African land for export crop production, coincided with a separation between the labour of women and men in many Kenyan social groups. Forced labour legislation was introduced in the *Labour Circular No. 1* of October 1919. This allowed settlers to approach chiefs in the reserves and demand the services of any number of people, most of whom were women and children (Tignor). Chiefs who did not comply were fined or fired. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of acres of African land were expropriated by European ex-soldiers in the Soldier Settler Scheme of 1919. Africans' taxes were nearly tripled, wages were reduced by one third in 1921, and *kipande* laws (pass book registration) were brought into force in 1919. The *kipande* was a card that all African men over the age of 16 were legally required to wear in a metal box around their necks whenever they left home. The card recorded men's work assignments and length of contract. If a man abandoned his work, authorities could trace his employer and return him to service until the contract expired. Africans

viewed this as a form of enslavement.

In response to the increasing alienation of land, African chiefs, headmen, and mission employees formed the Kikuyu Association in 1919, the first African political organization working on constitutional reforms. Harry Thuku was a prominent land-owning Kikuyu activist who established the East African Association in 1921. This second organization opposed the collaboration of African chiefs and headmen in the Kikuyu Association with the British administration and settlers. Thuku was outspoken especially against the forced labour of African women on the European coffee estates.

Harry Thuku, known as the Chief of Women, was arrested on March 14, 1922 and held at the police lines in Nairobi. The East African Association officials rallied African workers in Nairobi to go on strike to protest Thuku's arrest. On March 15 some 8,000 transport, domestic, and government employees deserted their workplaces and gathered where Thuku was being held (Buell). Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru and her stepdaughter were among those who came out to demonstrate. Nyanjiru was a Kikuyu woman who moved to Nairobi in the first part of the twentieth century. Her young stepdaughter, Elizabeth Waruiru, lived with her in a rented room (Wipper). Members of the East African Association administered oaths to over 200 women in the crowd on the evening of March 15 outside of the police lines (Spencer; Wipper). Oaths bind the oath-takers to perform a specific duty. The oath taken on that day was highly unusual because it broke with the practice of excluding women (Kenyatta).

The crowd demanding Thuku's release dispersed at night but gathered again on the following morning (Buell). As the crowd grew, Jomo Kenyatta, a leader of the East African Association, held a meeting with Acting Governor, Sir Charles Bowring (Singh). Around noontime, Kenyatta told the crowd that the

governor would not release Thuku but had promised him a fair trial. Kenyatta urged the crowd to disperse. People began to stand up. Some began to leave. Others accused the deputation of having been bribed by the administration.

Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru was standing at the front of the gathering, near the East African Association deputation when it made its announcement. The crowd was agitated. Nyanjiru threw her dress over her shoulders and exposed her nakedness to the crowd. She shouted "You take my dress and give me your trousers. You men are cowards. What are you waiting for? Our leader is in there. Let's get him!" (Rosberg and Nottingham 51-52). Nyanjiru stood only a few feet away from agitated armed guards who had been on duty for 18 continuous hours. She used the strongest form of political protest that she had at her disposal: the exposure of her body. This was a customary form of women's protest called *guturamira ngani* "the curse of nakedness." She thereby damned the prominent East African Association leaders, members of the crowd, and the African guards.

The crowd was galvanized by Mary's actions. Those who were beginning to disperse returned. A large section of the crowd rushed forwards toward the iron fence. People shouted, threw stones, and lunged forward. The women and men pressed up to the armed guards. The guards began to fire. There are reports that white settlers and trophy hunters on the verandah of the nearby Norfolk Hotel joined in the shooting and killed people as they fled (Thuku). Estimates of the death toll range from 26 to 150 (Singh). Many of the dead were shot in the back. At least four women were killed, including Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru.

Only in 1932, ten years after Nyanjiru's death, did the Compulsory Labour (Regulation) Ordinance ban forced labour in general. Nevertheless, the Ordinance still allowed it under certain circumstances and for

works of public importance (Singh). Another result of the protest was a governmental crackdown on inter-ethnic organizing. In 1925, the Deputy Chief Native Commissioner disallowed the continuation of the activities of the East African Association on the grounds that the government could not accept an organization that could be joined by all races. He added that if they formed an association of Kikuyu alone, the government would allow their activities. A few days later the East African Association changed its name to the Kikuyu Central Association (Singh). Women were not allowed to join. In the 1930s and 1940s, women formed and participated in political organizing within the Mumbi Central Association (MCA). Cora Ann Presley has argued that the MCA was a radical revision of the traditional women's council (*kiama kia atumia*) and used as a wedge for entry into the activities of the Kikuyu Central Association (7). These activists later used their collective energies in the MCA to mobilize thousands of women for the Mau Mau war.

Several authors have written about the involvement of women in the Mau Mau war of 1952 to 1960. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that women engaged in the supplying the armed forces with food, medicines, clothing, information, guns and ammunition (Likimani; Kinyatti 1980, 1986; Kanogo; Otieno Presley; Santilli; White). Women fought in the forest, spied on enemy forces, harboured wanted men, composed Mau Mau hymns and songs, and sacrificed their lives (Likimani; Kinyatti 1986). Over a million Kikuyu civilians, mostly women, children and the elderly, were enclosed in some 850 concentration camps guarded by armed British and African soldiers, and sometimes under 24 hour curfews (Fletcher).

Tens of thousands of women were arrested when it was discovered they were taking part in oath-taking ceremonies or feeding guerrillas. Eleven-

year-old girls were sentenced to seven years hard labour for taking Mau Mau oaths, while other eleven and twelve-year-old girls were sentenced to life in prison for "consorting" with Mau Mau fighters (Fletcher). If prisoners did not confess and denounce the Mau Mau, they were labelled "hard core" and committed to forced labour, quarrying and breaking stones, building roads and airports, and burying executed Mau Mau prisoners. Thousands of Mau Mau women, men, and their descendants were further punished when, in 1955, "all Terrorist [*sic*] lands were confiscated" (Kournossoff 217). In subsequent years the Mau Mau, rendered landless, constituted a pool of cheap labour for expanding agriculture and became the source of a new generation of resisters.

Though the militant Mau Mau women and men forced the British to grant independence to the colony in 1963, it was the African homeguards or collaborators with the British, who gained the most in terms of land, government positions, and economic opportunities. The new homeguard government also carried on the export-focused economic policies of the colonialists. These policies were intensified by structural adjustment in the 1980s and corporate globalization in the 1990s and 2000s.

This review of some of the high

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points of women's direct action in Kenyan history provides a context for an examination of the resurgence of subsistence in the 1990s. This examination includes the Freedom Corner hunger strike where women's direct action remains a key element. Many of the people involved in the Freedom Corner movement

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and in subsequent land occupations were active in the guerilla war of the 1950s. Others are the children and grandchildren of Mau Mau, or of parents who were involved in one of the many different expressions of resistance, including unions, ethnic associations, and informal protest groups. Still others who have no family history of involvement in the independence struggle, take up the clarion call of the Mau Mau—"land and freedom for all" (First Woman 1997).

#### **Direct Action at Freedom Corner**

Women's direct action at Freedom Corner, Nairobi in 1992 set the stage for the land reappropriations of 2000 and thereafter. The action revealed gendered class solidarity and tensions that continue into the new millennium. The women of Freedom Corner connect Kenya's past to its future. They link the Mau Mau affirmation of subsistence to subse-

quent popular land occupations and anti-corporate globalization movements worldwide.

On February 28, 1992, 12 African women organized the Release Political Prisoners (RPP) lobby group and began a hunger strike at Freedom Corner in Nairobi. They demanded the release of their sons and brothers, political prisoners who were incarcerated for their involvement in agitation for democratic change in the country. The women ranged in age from mid-20s to mid-70s. Before beginning the hunger strike, they had delivered an open letter to Kenya's Attorney General, Amos Wako, to protest the continued incarceration by the Kenya Government of scores of political prisoners (Nation Team 1992a).

Freedom Corner is a section of Uhuru [Freedom] Park in Nairobi's city centre. It had been the site of a successful campaign by environmentalist and feminist Wangari Maathai. Maathai and others who stopped the Kenya government from using a World Bank loan to build a skyscraper in the middle of the park. The government dropped the project just days before the women began their hunger strike at the site of the planned skyscraper. Two months earlier, in December 1991, the President had given in to national and international pressure to repeal section 2(A) of the Kenya Constitution, which had made Kenya a single-party state for a decade. The return to multiparty democracy fueled demands for greater freedoms including the release of men imprisoned for their agitation for a democracy that had been brought into law.

By the fourth day of the women's hunger strike, thousands of people had gathered at Freedom Corner in support. On the morning of Tuesday March 3, 1992, the Head of the Public Service, Philip Mbithi, warned the mothers to leave Freedom Corner and end their strike:

The Government has noted with concern that since Saturday 29

February 1992, the hunger strike has been used by the opposition to hold unlicensed meetings, illegal processions and demonstrations. The hunger strike has also been used to promote acts of violence. Such acts include stoning of motorists along Uhuru Highway and Valley Road, traffic obstructions and inconveniencing of members of the public. Further, the hunger strike has facilitated the violation of the Nairobi City Commission by-laws related to erecting of tents, display of banners and destruction of the vegetation....

Accordingly, the Government has decided that this potential threat to security in Nairobi must come to an end. The mothers of the hunger strike are informed that their specific message had been received and are, therefore, advised to call off their strike immediately and return to their homes. (Nation Reporter 2)

The order was given, but the women refused to obey. By 3:00pm, several hundred policemen had surrounded the protest site at Freedom Corner to forcibly evict the mothers. They first beat, whipped, and dispersed the Release Political Prisoners youth and other members of the public who had gathered in a security cordon around the fasting women. Once the police broke the protestors' security cordon, General Service Unit soldiers threw tear gas into the tent where the hunger-fatigued women held firm.

Policemen then indiscriminately battered the old women as they emerged from their tent. They specifically targeted Wangari Maathai for attack. She was beaten unconscious. It was after the tear gas had immobilized most of the protestors that hunger striker Ruth Wangari observed police brutalizing Kanene, a Release Political Prisoners (RPP) member. Wangari reported that:

After all this, I tried to think what I would do next. I then stripped my clothes and remained stark naked and started fighting with the policemen because I saw a young man called Kanene, who was one of us in RPP, struggling with a policeman who wanted to shoot him. I came in between them and stripped off my clothes.

When the young people saw me naked, they stopped fighting with the police. They ran away and we were left with only four policemen whom I know were Kalenjins and they were old men.<sup>1</sup> We fought with them and God helped. At that time, members of the public had come in large numbers and there were many motorists who had a chance to pick up the unconscious people and rush them to various hospitals. The people who were able to run away, ran, and I was left with the four policemen.

We stayed and at last calmness prevailed. We then put on our clothes and stayed there even as the police pulled down our tent and took it with them plus our other belongings. (First Woman 1996)

Two other women had thrown off their shirts. Wangari Maathai explained the action similar to that taken by Mary Muthoni Nyanjiru 70 years earlier: in exposing their bodies, and more particularly their vaginas, the women

were showing disgust and contempt for sons who had the nerve to come and beat their own mothers. In Kikuyu tradition, they were cursing the men, saying, "I have no respect for you. I wish I had never given birth to you." (Zwartz 2)

Ruth Wangari explained what her stripping meant: since she had given life to sons, she had the capacity to

symbolically revoke the lives of degenerate sons by baring her body. By running towards the police, she denied them life and simultaneously saved the life of her ally, Kanene. In a single act, Ruth Wangari established the mothers of Freedom Corner not only as mothers to their own sons in prison, but as mothers of a whole generation. International news coverage of the police brutality and Ruth Wangari's curse of nakedness put the women of Freedom Corner onto a global stage and prompted an outpouring of support for the women's cause.

In the meantime, much of the rest of Nairobi was rising up. "We are protesting against the government to release all political prisoners. We want them released now and now," said one youth who was carrying a stone, ready to confront police officers in Ronald Ngala Street in the city centre (Macharia, Otieno and Owino 1-2). The riots started at around 9:00am on Wednesday March 4, 1992. Subsistence traders and public transport workers at the Gikomba market and the Machakos bus terminus boycotted their work in protest against police attacks on the women of Freedom Corner.

Motorists who defied the transport strike were stoned. Most Kenya Bus Service vehicles were withdrawn after several were pelted with stones. Large crowds engaged in running battles with police throughout the city. The protestors easily outnumbered the police. The government called in the dreaded General Service Unit soldiers. The *Nation* reported that "Lawlessness assumed a great dimension" (Nation Team 1992b: 1, 5). Looters cleaned out shops. Minibus operators hiked fares. Angry protestors burnt busses and other vehicles. School headmasters sent pupils home early. The normally bustling Country Bus Station was deserted. According to reports in the *Nation*, at the end of the day, subsistence traders and public transport workers vowed to continue their strike in support of the mothers (Na-

tion Team 1992b). It was several days before the city returned to "normal."

Outside of Nairobi, a different kind of turmoil reigned. The Kenyan government sponsored the training and organization of illegal paramilitaries. These paramilitaries then unleashed terror in the countryside, aimed at clearing peasants from prime agricultural land. Members of specific ethnic groups were targeted, as were people who supported the newly legalized political opposition parties. These politically-sponsored land clearances created an internal refugee population which was to reach 300,000 by the mid-1990s. Hundreds of people who were violently evicted from their rural farms in 1992 made their way to Freedom Corner, where the women continued their vigil in the basement of the nearby All Saints Cathedral. Some mothers of political prisoners found that while they were on the vigil in Nairobi, their rural relatives were attacked and their homes burned to the ground (First Woman 1997). Others who had been evicted from their homes were looking for sanctuary. They were drawn to the Freedom Corner women at the Cathedral because news of the women's courage had spread throughout the country via graphic photos and news reports.

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Freedom Corner broke the grip of terror and heralded the resurgence of resistance in Kenya. Many of the mothers were Mau Mau women in the 1950s. They had been involved in the armed uprising against British imperialists and their African collaborators, or homeguards. The 1992 hunger strike and Ruth Wangari's

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"curse of nakedness" (*guturamira ngania*) opened channels of gendered class solidarity between women and men, between rural and urban subsistence producers and traders, and between Kenyans and other activists globally.

The women of Freedom Corner left the refuge of the church a year later, in February 1993, after the government released from prison and detention the 51st of the 52 men whose liberation the mothers had demanded. The 52nd political prisoner, James Apiny Adhiambo, was released on November 14, 1997, after a five-year international campaign coordinated by the Release Political Prisoners pressure group.

#### **Freedom Corner: A Decade On**

We the Muungano wa Wanavijiji want this: after we teach the people how to fight for their rights, and after repossessing our villages, we want

everybody, meaning the poor people, to have better living conditions and development in that village.... Like having good schools, and everything good so that our children could also develop and also [have] good health. Because the situation we are in now is awful. And that is why the grabbers get the chance to come and destroy our houses and grab the village. Because when they burn our houses, they just burn easily. But when we build permanent houses, they can't burn easily. (First Woman 1998)

Out of the Freedom Corner movement emerged a slum-dwellers' group called the Muungano wa Wanavijiji (Organization of Villagers). The core organizers first came together in 1990 to protest evictions and the demolition of urban residential and market sites. The Muungano wa Wanavijiji enjoyed great popularity and expansion after joining the women of Freedom Corner in 1992.

Strategically located in the Muungano network were women Mau Mau fighters whose premise was that in the 1950s war for "land and freedom," "women never surrendered" (First Woman 1994).

We [in Muungano wa Wanavijiji,] have followed what the Mau Mau were fighting for, because they were fighting for land, and we are also fighting for land. Because the reason we have so many slum dwellers in Nairobi, is lack of land.

And if you ask the slum dwellers, you will find that their parents were Mau Mau fighters. Their people are the ones who were in the forest and yet they didn't get land or anything. And they are the ones who are now spread all over. So we want everyone to be given land and to be given assurance of owning this land. (First Woman 1998)

In May 1998, a chief claimed ownership of a plot of land in Kamae village, ten kilometers outside Nairobi. Kamae is home to a community of small-scale subsistence farmers, traders, and casual labourers on nearby coffee estates. Most households are female-headed. There is a high degree of collectivity among the women. They share food, agricultural labour, child and elder care, and other resources. Residents claim that the land, part of an expansive farm owned by Jomo Kenyatta, was given to them by the late president. They do not hold title deeds.

On May 5, 1998, a chief moved in with dozens of armed guards to occupy a portion of the village land. He claimed he was going to build a home for street children. Kamae villager, Salome Wacera Wainaina was working in her garden when she noticed the chief and his men. She confronted the chief and called to her neighbours for help. Police shot into the crowd that had quickly formed, killed Salome Wainaina, and injured a young man. Caroline Atieno, a secretary of Muungano wa Wanavijiji, stated that:

In Muungano, I can say that the women are in the front line.... for example, in Kamae village, where a woman was in the front line protesting about the land grabbing. We Muungano and the Release Political Prisoners did a demonstration and left the coffin at the Provincial Commissioner's office. So the women were the people who are very active in protesting. (First Woman 1998)

Salome Wacera Wainaina lost her life in the defence of Kamae land, while residents retained the land that the chief had tried to expropriate. The land-grabbing chief lost his bid to occupy the Kamae peoples' land. The policeman who killed Wainaina was allowed to keep his job; his only punishment was a transfer out of Nairobi. After the confrontation,

more Kamae residents became involved in the Muungano wa Wanavijiji to defend their own land and the threatened land of others. They focused much energy on resistance to the destruction of subsistence market sites in Nairobi. These are essential to the livelihood of millions of landless women and men.

Muungano wa Wanavijiji explicitly promotes education and land rights for women. It dismisses female genital mutilation as dangerous and outmoded. In the past, female genital mutilation tied together an entire system of community access to land. Widespread landlessness among men constituted a problem for this system. Men's dispossession does not immediately imply that women stop marrying or stop circumcisions. But the imperative arises for women to engage in squatting and land reappropriations in which they take control over land themselves. This offers an opening through which relations between women and men around land, sexuality, production, and trade are being re-examined and solidarities built on new bases.

### Conclusion

The women of Freedom Corner engaged in direct action to defend their children. Behind this lay their support for the causes for which those children had originally been imprisoned. Most of the political prisoners had been resisting the devastating policies of a commodifying regime that were destroying the subsistence bases of their communities. The organized defence of the subsistence political economy in Kenya poses a challenge to corporate globalization because of its collectivity, its woman-centredness and its actual, vibrant reality.

Subsistence is not a remote ideal; it is being practiced daily by a huge range and number of people. The Freedom Corner action has a triple significance for the development of an emergent land occupation movement.

First, the old women broke through the wall of repressive silence that had contained dispossessed Kenyans since the Mau Mau insurgency. The state had trouble dismissing the women because initially they seemed innocuous, hardly a threat. Ultimately, these women gained so much national and international support that the state's brutality was stayed. The regime's basis in repression was threatened by what amounted to mutiny by police. Ruth Wangari's curse of nakedness rendered the police unwilling to act against the women, whom they saw as their own mothers. The success of the women's campaign spurred direct action against commercialized production by thousands of others. Increasingly after 1991 the state has used violent force to punish those who identify with the political opposition and reject participation in corporate world trade (Turner, Brownhill, and Kaara).

Second, the mothers of Freedom Corner brought together issues of freedom for political prisoners with a host of other concerns, including religious freedom, the freedom for subsistence farmers to grow and trade food (not export crops), and the freedom for women to engage in politics directly, unmediated by political parties, unions, or men.

Third, the power of the Freedom Corner women's actions was rooted in at least two facets of the subsistence political economy: collectivity and the prioritization of life over profit. The Freedom Corner women had lived most of their lives practicing subsistence-related production and trade. Central to this was cooperation and collectivity among women. This collectivity was a strength the women harnessed for productive activities and, when required, to turn *their collective energies to demonstrate against injustices*. In this social milieu, anything that threatened women's capacities to sustain their families was an injustice. A majority of Kenyan women are deeply involved in subsistence farming and related activities. *Commodification*

of land and agriculture under the regime of corporate globalization is pushing many of them to turn their collectivity towards resistance.

Freedom Corner has additionally spurred the activities of debt repudiators in the Jubilee 2000 campaign and the Kenya Debt Network. Through these groups, Freedom Corner women have spoken out at international fora, including the June 2001 protest against the G-8's corporate globalization in Genoa. Wangari Maathai and her Green Belt Movement continue to mobilize rural women, in particular, for reforestation and against the privatization and destruction of forests (Kago and Munene). Release Political Prisoners continues to speak out, organize, and demonstrate *not only on issues of political imprisonment but on land redistribution, police brutality, and human rights*.

Freedom Corner was also an important space for the growth of *Mungiki* (Congress), a multi-class, mass organization that claims 4.5 million members. These are drawn from a cross-section of society and include dispossessed subsistence traders as well as members of the Kenyan Parliament and armed forces. *Mungiki* members pay monthly dues of ten Kenya shillings [about 15 U.S. cents]. The organization has made significant progress towards estab-

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lishing workers' control over labour processes and resources. Central to this campaign for a subsistence political economy is control over subsistence markets and the buses plying public transport routes. In 2001 Mungiki repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to enforce a general strike through control of the national public transport system.

The extent to which Muungano wa Wanavijiji and Mungiki value subsistence is an open question. Their activities however, widen and protect the space won by Ruth Wangari and the other women of Freedom Corner. Their interests in subsistence production and trade have gained prominence in the decade since 1992. Muungano wa Wanavijiji has articulated the clearest Kenyan subsistence vision so far. This vision includes communal title deeds to slum land, the establishment of autonomous community development, and an end to the war on subsistence trade.

The women of Freedom Corner and of the Muungano wa Wanavijiji are but two of the many groups in Kenya and elsewhere in Africa engaged in offering a subsistence alternative to corporate world trade. Members of these movements and networks do so by growing their own food, by repudiating the production of export crops, by reinvigorating regional subsistence trade routes, by defending the land of subsistence producers and the market sites of subsistence traders and by integrating their affirmations with movements for political freedoms, debt repudiation, and reparations. Kenyan activists are building up a matrix of resistance. This matrix includes global links with similar movements in defence of political prisoners, for debt repudiation, and for land to the landless. It includes local and global links among different types of movements such as those working in defence of political prisoners and those repudiating debt.

We have argued that subsistence trade offers an alternative to world

trade. Freedom Corner reveals the sophistication of an historically deep movement of dispossessed Kenyan women engaged in defending the freedom to live outside of an increasingly commodified world order. Social movements that have arisen and gained strength from the Freedom Corner movement, especially Muungano wa Wanavijiji, continue to elaborate the work of social reconstruction. We have drawn on the histories of dispossessed peoples' militancy in Kenya to demonstrate that the alternatives to corporate globalization are being reinvented and resolved on the ground by the most exploited. Their movements are immediate to their own lives, but extend also to an international social movement of globalization from below. These Kenyan movements of the dispossessed are woman-centred. They are putting forth alternatives that embrace the needs of all and strike a blow in favour of subsistence, against the exclusionary prerogative of corporate global trade.

<sup>1</sup>These four policemen's ethnicity and age meant they were not affected by Ruth Wangari's "curse," which is customarily used by old women against young men, and is most powerfully effective when the "curser" and the "cursed" come from the same ethnic group.

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## MARGO SWISS

### Mary's Hands

*for Mary Belka*

Mary's hands are all  
that are needed now.  
Her voice and  
lamb-like face  
recede.  
Hands alone  
and only hers  
become God's upon my shoulders,  
now uncrossed,  
perform their act of mercy  
to transubstantiate my grief.

God's body once undone  
became itself a burden  
to be taken down  
swallowed by death  
yet rose;  
so mine  
world weary and torn  
is hosted by one who  
breathing Love in his Name  
consumes my pain.

She is Mary  
gentle tender of wounds  
by whose strokes  
I am healed

*Margo Swiss's poetry appears earlier in this volume.*