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## When different forms of oppression come together on the same subjects

*Using “intersectionality” in her reflection, the author highlights how essential it is to understand how various situations of oppression often befall the same subject. This is especially true when it comes to women in territories of capitalist exploitation. And she asks: Why not also include nature as a subject in this process?*

It is not possible to talk about so-called “Nature-Based Solutions” (NBS) removed from the green economy; or to talk about the green economy without addressing capitalism and its new—and old—forms of accumulation, which are tied to colonialism, racism and patriarchy, the pillars without which it could not work.

So one must ask: What is racist, colonial and patriarchal about proposals such as NBS? And to answer this, we can use a powerful tool of analysis, such as intersectionality.

*Intersectionality* as a concept was first defined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an Afro-descendant woman from the United States. It has emerged as a tool to understand how different forms of segregation, or multiple forms of oppression, come together—or intersect—on a single subject.

This vision allows us to understand, for example, how Afro-descendant or indigenous women are doubly oppressed, given that racial or ethnic and gender issues intersect in them; and many times, issues of class, nationality, body structure and age do as well. It is a conjunction of complex situations of oppression that befall the same subjects.

The intersectionality approach allows us to understand questions such as: Why do more women than men die in climate disasters? Why are there more women than men with cancer in areas where oil is extracted? Why are more impoverished people dying of COVID-19? Why are Nature-Based Solutions implemented mostly in countries in the global South?

The answers do not lie in genetics, nor in the type of ecosystem. They lie in issues of race, gender and class.

For example, women are in charge of the sick, the elderly and children. If there is a flood or hurricane, the women will not be able to escape, because they are doing caretaking work. In many places, few women know how to read, and announcements about possible disasters are often made in public places—where women do not go; or women are not able to understand the written information. We also know that one of the problems caused by global warming is a rise in diseases, and so more caretaking work falls to women. Likewise, with growing water scarcity and the hoarding of water sources, women must work harder to bring water to their homes, or they must go increasingly farther to collect firewood for cooking.

The same occurs in areas with oil or mining conflicts. As territories are masculinized and violence in communities grows, police or military forces, company workers, private security forces, illicit drug deals and bars arrive. This causes an increase in alcohol consumption, sexual abuse, and domestic

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violence. In this context, women suffer the most—from both the escalation of violence and the diseases associated with pollution. In the northern Ecuadorian Amazon, it is mainly women who are affected by cancer: Of the documented cases, 71% are women and 29% men. That is, they experience the combination of being indigenous and peasant women, and of having their bodies more exposed to polluted rivers where they wash clothes, and to gas burners next to their homes—among other ills.

>From a perspective of intersectionality, one can say that in these sacrificed territories, several forms of socio-ecological oppression intersect in women's bodies. Or in other words, feminist body politics and political ecology join together in the territories.

Now in the new context of COVID-19, we can say that just as indigenous, peasant and impoverished women are more impacted by climate disasters and extractivism, it is impoverished, Afro-descendant, indigenous, migrant or Latina women who are more exposed to the disease—and thus at greater risk of contracting and dying from it. And due to the very conditions of economic and social marginalization, they suffer the most from the economic effects of the pandemic.

### ***Solutions designed to create more dispossession***

Throughout history, capitalism has needed to make distinctions among races. Where these distinctions already existed, it has exacerbated them; where they did not, it has had to introduce them. The same is true of distinctions between the genders and conditions of poverty. In this way, it has justified the exploitation of peoples in the South, migrants, women and millions of workers.

The new phase of globalized, financial and digital capitalism has been depressed by recurring crises—environmental, financial, social,—which in turn provoke crises of accumulation. To try to defray these crises, capitalists invent more markets and new commodities based on the cycles and functions of nature, as well as new frontiers to implement their new businesses.

This is why the Paris Agreement was conceived, as well as all the facets and frameworks that have been developed from it. One of these is “Nature-Based Solutions,” (NBS) which are designed to get even more out of the environmental and climate crises. NBS are a collusion between international conservation organizations, the financial sector and the corporate sector. But so were the carbon, biodiversity, water and other offset mechanisms. The CDM and REDD, for example, were already “nature-based solutions.”

As commercial and financial products, NBS are one step further in the advancement of the green economy, and they are also somewhat more sophisticated. They talk about nature in a utilitarian fashion, they extensively use computer technology, both for their ultra-fast transactions and to control territories, and they create even more mixed up commodities. But NBS continue, outrageously, to use language that deceptively suggests they are inclusive of women, indigenous peoples, and now workers.

We can see that Nature-Based Solutions are now playing up the idea that climate change can be better faced with “women *in alliance* with nature,” and that nature is now *hiring*, as stated in the title of an ILO and WWF document from October 2020 (1). The cover of this document shows a woman, black and hardworking, managing nature in South Africa.

Just because she is smiling broadly while doing her “green job,” does not mean she is not just another hardworking woman—no doubt exploited with a low-paid, one-off job. Capitalism requires

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women that are paid poorly or not at all, women from the South, and now women to do work for green capital.

Nature-Based Solutions create jobs such as stewarding the carbon in rainforest trees, or cooking for squads of men cutting down balsa wood in Ecuador—which will be used in China in the *green job* of building blades for wind turbines. The turbines are also manufactured with metals that come from areas where women are violated, where they must walk increasingly farther to find clean water and firewood to have energy in their homes; and they must do so because these same resources are extracted by companies that claim to offset their damages using none other than Nature-Based Solutions.

### ***Nature as a subject itself***

While intersectionality is a very useful tool to look at the conjunction of various forms of oppression, it falls short when looking at the complexity of the new forms of green capitalism. We must therefore broaden the group of subjects. Why not include nature as a legal subject? This way, we will be able to look at the oppression not only of human beings, but also of non-human beings.

Nature is also exploited, objectified, feminized, racialized and turned into an exploited worker that produces environmental resources, goods and services. Clearly, the oppression of women, indigenous peoples, peasants and workers, and the oppression of nature occurs simultaneously. In fact, we cannot—we must not—talk about the history of patriarchy, the sociology of work, or the essence of racism, without taking into account nature as a subject in this process.

With green capitalism and its same-as-always, nature-based solutions, we see that the concept of intersectionality takes on new meaning. Any analysis derived from just one point of discrimination—be it ethnic, gender or social—hides nature from the context, reducing the analysis to identity experiences isolated from the territory in which the discrimination occurs.

Thus, in the face of discrimination against body-territory subjects, we will be better able to understand the relationship between oppressors and those who are exploited in capitalism using a diverse intersectionality approach. And in this way, we can advance the defense of human rights, women's rights and the rights of nature.

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(1) ILO. WWF. NATURE HIRES: [How Nature-based Solutions can power a green jobs recovery](#). October 2020.