



## Research in Progress: Making Feminist Sense of 'the Anti-Globalisation Movement'

Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguascha

From the Zapatistas to Seattle, from the World Social Forum to Bolivian campaigns against water privatisation, struggles against the globalisation of neo-liberal, corporate-led, war-mongering capitalism have been grabbing the headlines and reshaping political imaginations worldwide. Many commentators and activists consider these struggles to constitute one of the most significant social movements to emerge on the world stage in recent years. Despite a general interest in what is still widely (and problematically) referred to as 'the anti-globalisation movement', and much controversy over its political significance and course of development, little attention has yet been paid to feminist involvement. This has resulted in the absence of feminism from dominant accounts and images of the movement (see Eschle, 2005a; for recent moves in a more inclusive direction, see Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Sen et al. 2003). Feminist academic literature has reinforced this impression. While paying substantial attention to women's organising in the context of globalisation (e.g. Rowbotham and Linkogle, 2001; Naples and Desai, 2002), it has not yet provided a systematic account of women's participation or gendered relations of power within 'the anti-globalisation movement' as such (for pointers in this direction see Mohanty, 2003; Marchand, 2004). It is our view that the impression that feminists are absent from the movement is both empirically wrong and politically problematic: it feeds off and into the marginalisation in practice of those feminists who are striving to influence the anti-globalisation movement from within.

We believe that feminist anti-globalisation activism is a significant phenomenon worthy of serious study. Why? Our fieldwork has shown that there are very many feminist activists and groups who strongly identify with the movement, who are a vibrant and creative presence within it, and who continue to struggle for visibility and voice. Further, we, like many others, would insist on the blurred line between activism and academia, and between activism and the production of theory. Activists should thus not be treated simply as objects of study, a case study of particular movement practices, but as producers of knowledge about that movement. Reflection on the interrelation between subject and object of study and between theory and practice is a particularly

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strong tradition in feminism, and feminist 'anti-globalisation' activists have important things to say about theories of globalisation, gender, resistance, movement politics and social change. Finally, we would argue that the erasure or marginalisation of feminist activists within dominant accounts and practices of 'the anti-globalisation movement' is a product of oppressive power relations that need to be exposed and challenged as a vital part of the pursuit of other possible worlds (also see pieces by Dowling, L. Sullivan and S. Sullivan, this issue).

These are the reasons behind our ongoing book project, which aims to provide an empirical and theoretical study of feminist 'anti-globalisation' activism. Based on field research conducted at the European and World Social Forums over the last two years, the book will make women's and feminist activism visible by mapping the organisational and ideological linkages and disjunctures between groups, and outlining their practices. It will also bring women's and feminist self-understandings centre-stage, exploring interview material on the reasons why feminist anti-globalisation activists mobilise, their negotiations of movement identity and their dreams for the future. In so doing, we aim to make a little-studied phenomenon visible and audible to other activists and to scholars. We thus hope to contribute to a richer, more critical understanding of this movement and its theoretical and political implications.

Why the World Social Forum as a focus for empirical work? Importantly, it attracts activists, including feminists, from all over the world. Moreover, participants are encouraged to articulate strategies and alternative worlds as well as critiques of the current world order, and they use the site to build broader networks and advertise diverse activist practices and agendas. This allows us to glimpse the wider terrain of feminist 'anti-globalisation' activism. We recognise that many activists choose not or are unable to attend the World Social Forum in its various manifestations, and that it is a contested and problematic space/process in which some activist practices are privileged over others. However, this is true of all other sites in which anti-globalisation activism can be observed and mapped. Further, while we would acknowledge that there are some significant limitations to fieldwork ranging over diverse geographical sites, it nonetheless enables us to offer a broad-brush map of transnational contexts and historical processes in ways that deeper ethnographic studies may miss. Our mappings are situated, partial and preliminary and we hope they will be a helpful precursor to further work on specific feminist anti-globalisation groups.

So who, exactly, are we talking about? We have talked to over seventy activists from fifty-eight women's organisations, or organisations which seek gender equality or the revaluation or disruption of gender difference as one of their basic goals – feminist by our definition, if not necessarily by theirs. These groups range from the All India Democratic Women's Association in India, 'an independent left oriented women's organisation' with a membership of over seven million and a focus on the urban and rural poor (see <http://www.aidwa.org>) to feminist ATTAC, a working group within ATTAC Austria, concerned to factor a feminist voice into critiques of neo-liberal globalization (see <http://www.attac.at/907.html>); from NextGeneration, a European-wide network of students/graduates interested in the connections between feminist theory and practice and 'anti-racist, anti-heterosexist and post-colonial standpoints' (<http://www.nextgeneration.net/>), to the World March of Women, a federation of

groups from over 160 countries, striving to get women into the streets to protest neoliberalism, poverty and violence (see [www.marchemondiale.org](http://www.marchemondiale.org)). These groups are highly diverse and often in acute disagreement. In addition, a proportion of our interviewees identify as feminist or as pro-women's emancipation or rights but are active in more mixed or non-feminist groups – Marxist and anarchist organisations, radical samba collectives, peace groups, etc. This is highly complex terrain and these are only the first steps to making sense of it. We need to consider the divergences and conflicts as well as connections between activists, and to pay attention to hierarchies and exclusions in their/our practices.

Our conduct of the fieldwork and analysis of its results have been influenced by three main sets of academic debates: social movement studies, critical theorising in International Relations (IR) on the politics of resistance and, most fundamentally, feminist scholarship. As academics located primarily in the discipline of IR, we root this project in the attack by critical theory, broadly conceived, on the very constitution of the discipline, its subject of study and methods of enquiry. Critical theorists share the notion that “[t]heory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose” (Cox, 1986: 207): that is, the act of theorising is always political. Thus they interrogate the relation between power and knowledge production; they expose and denaturalise power hierarchies and relations of domination more generally; and they seek out immanent possibilities for disruption, resistance and transformative change. It is in this context that they insist on the importance of exploring social struggles and resistances, whether conceptualised as social movements or not, as crucial sites of world politics, or what can be referred to as ‘the politics of resistance’ (see Eschle and Maiguascha, 2005; e.g. Gills, 2000). Our project both draws upon and hopes to contribute to this politics of resistance literature. Although we find it theoretically suggestive, we would also argue there have been few sustained empirical studies of movements within this literature or attempts at reflection on how such study should be conducted.

For tools to do so, we turn in part to social movement theory. Largely developed within the discipline of Sociology, social movement theory is a highly diverse field. Arguably, a synthesis is currently occurring whereby researchers pay attention to changing state, inter-state and economic structures, the economic and cultural resources available, the structures of organisation and ideological ‘frames’ that develop, and the shared identities that emerge (e.g. Kennedy and Zald, 2000). This project speaks to all these themes but it has also been influenced most directly by the ‘constructivist’ approach (e.g. Melucci, 1996), with its insistence that movements are not stable actors with pre-formed interests but rather ongoing processes in which diverse actors, including academic commentators, contribute to the construction of a common identity. This means being explicit about the fact that the researcher helps call the movement into existence (see Eschle, 2005b). It also means paying close attention to activist self-understandings, specifically through interviews.

This resonates strongly with feminist methodology. Now, it should be clear that feminism provides the overarching political impetus of this project: it is one form of and approach to the politics of resistance. But it also brings with it some key methodological imperatives. We would stress that feminism is *not* unified and thus does not offer one set of prescriptions for research. However, generally speaking, feminist social science

generates its questions from women's lives, experiences and struggles, in the context of a gendered world. To put this another way, feminists insist upon 'adding in' gender as a key dimension of social science analysis, treating it as a power relation, one intertwined with other structures and relations of power in complex, context-specific ways. Moreover, the best feminist work takes care not to reduce women and men to mere effects of power, instead paying close attention to the ways in which individual and collective subjects are constructed and can have an impact on the world around them (see Harding, 1987; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Ramazanglu, 2002). As self-conscious students of and contributors to the feminist movement, feminist academics frequently focus specifically on the dynamics of movement organising. They have long insisted on crucial modifications to social movement scholarship, which we try to take on board here. These include the need to pay close attention to interpersonal, informal connections between activists as well as to formal organisational linkages and structural contexts; the importance of the 'private' sources and impact of political engagement as well as the more obvious 'public' dimensions; and the need to supplement studies of narrowly instrumental activist motivation by engaging with emotional and expressive drives (e.g. Taylor, 1988).

In our view, a feminist approach to social movements also strongly reinforces a constructivist emphasis on activist self-understandings and researcher reflexivity. We strive in this study to treat women and feminist activists as sources of knowledge rather than simply objects of study. However, we also recognise that activist narrations of their experiences are mediated by language, context and representation by the interviewer; that the relation between experience, identity and political mobilisation needs to be interrogated; and that the relation between ourselves as interviewers and our interviewees is a complex and hierarchical one. Fundamentally, feminist analysis emerges from political engagement; feminist researchers should situate themselves on the same critical plane as the object of study. Thus we would locate ourselves as part of feminist anti-globalisation activism and reflect self-critically on our relationship with the activists with whom we are engaged in dialogue.

We are currently constructing the book in three parts. The first explains the rationale of the book, telling the story of our fieldwork at the World Social Forum and encounters with feminist activism, and situating ourselves as feminist scholars. The second part offers tentative mappings of feminist anti-globalisation activism more generally, in terms of its historical origins, organisational composition and practices. Having established the feminist presence in 'the anti-globalisation movement' and outlined its contours and activities, we turn in the third part to the self-understandings of activists and the meanings they attribute to their actions. We explore activist accounts of personal motivation, collective identity formation and utopian aspirations, as articulated in interviews. We conclude by drawing out the implications of these mappings and self-understandings for rethinking 'the anti-globalisation movement' more generally, and for theorising the interplay between resistance, movements and politics.

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## the authors

Catherine Eschle teaches International Relations and feminist theory in the Department of Government, University of Strathclyde. Recent publications include *Critical Theories, World Politics and 'The Anti-Globalisation Movement'*, co-edited with Bice Maiguashca (London: Routledge, 2005); 'Skeleton Women: Feminism and 'the Anti-Globalisation Movement'', *Signs*, 30(3): 1741-1769, 2005; 'Taking Part: Social Movements, INGOs and Global Change' (with Neil Stammers), *Alternatives*, 29(3): 335-374, 2004; 'Feminist Studies of Globalisation: Beyond Gender, Beyond Economism?', *Global Studies*, 18(2): 97-125, 2004; and *Global Democracy, Social Movements and Feminism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001). Catherine is co-editor of *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.  
Address: Department of Government, University of Strathclyde, 16 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XQ  
E-mail: catherine.eschle@strath.ac.uk

Bice Maiguashca is a lecturer in the Department of Politics at the University of Exeter. Recent publications include *Critical Theories, World Politics and 'The Anti-Globalisation Movement'*, co-edited with Catherine Eschle (London: Routledge, 2005); *Politics of Governance/Politics of Resistance*, co-edited with D. Armstrong and T. Farrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and 'Theorising Knowledge from Political Practices: The Case of the Women's Reproductive Rights Movement', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, forthcoming 2005. Bice is associate editor of the *Review of International Studies*.

Address: Department of Politics, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter, Devon, EX4 4RJ  
E-mail: b.maiguascha@ex.ac.uk