

Preliminary Notes Towards Caring Economies: Postcapitalist Feminist Political Ecology Strategies

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Abstract

This paper is based on a talk given as part of the common topics panel, entitled feminist economics and ecology, organised at the 2024 Japan Association for Feminist Economics conference, as a forum for feminist political economy scholars in Japan to think of how to incorporate an analysis of the human-nature nexus into their own practice. This paper suggests two strategies for shifting analytical perspectives 1) from capitalocentric to diverse economies and 2) from human-centered to multispecies economies. These strategies aim to cultivate an ethical subjectivity that is curious about exploring our connections to those actors, things, and places that nurture us, so that we, through our analyses, enable economies that care for both humans and more-than-humans in support of our mutual survival. Drawing on insights from postcapitalist feminist political ecology, I built my discussion on the terms already familiar to feminist political economy scholars, such as care, social reproduction, labour, livelihoods, and intersectionality. This argument points out the importance of coupling these strategies with reflexivity, learning to learn to be affected by the vulnerabilities of others and ours, and learning to tell stories that encourage a subjectivity that is inclined to work towards making caring economies.

Keywords

Care, feminist political ecology, diverse economies, multispecies economies

Introduction

Growing up in western Japan, it is not at all surprising that I was socialised to admire cherry blossoms. They are the eco-cultural marker of the real arrival of spring, and I generally welcomed them with joy, even after having lived overseas for nearly three decades. However, in 2024, I experienced them as a warning for the first time in my life. Cherry trees in my Dutch neighbourhood used to bloom starting somewhere in late March to mid-April. This year, I observed the blossoms in mid-March and their petals fell before the end of March. This warning felt louder when I also observed that most tulips, one Dutch spring marker for many that is normally in bloom past mid-May, dropped their petals before the end of April. Moreover, June 2024, the month before the Japan Association for Feminist Economics conference in Tokyo, scored the highest monthly average temperature in Dutch recorded history. During a short visit to Japan in July-August, what I experienced was no longer *manatsu-bi*, hot summer days reaching over 30 degrees, which was becoming the norm before I left Japan in the late 90s, but *mosho-bi*, the new norm of extremely hot days which reach over 35 degrees. Even if one does not experience the extreme effects of climate change, changes are observable in our everyday lives. With global warming, our choices have changed our world and the burden is unevenly shared. How could those of us who enjoy privileges, like an air-conditioned life on extremely hot days, care about those in Fukushima, Minamata and other distant sacrifice zones, including Okinawa and Hokkaido while they bear the social and environmental costs produced by our everyday well-being? And, what about more-than-human earth others? While *kumazemi* (black cicada) might have gained more living spaces spreading from southern to northeastern parts of Japan over a few decades, how are myriads of other earth others coping with extreme heat and prolonged summer days in Japan? When we think of an economy that is caring, how can we understand economy in a way that supports care about the well-being of those who suffer from our indifference and climate change – both humans and more-than-human earth others?

Food is one way to think of our interdependence with distant humans

and earth others. There is a saying in many different languages, including Japanese, which suggests that we are what we eat. I quote Martha McMahon, a feminist sociologist of environment and climate change who made connections between this saying and commodity fetishism, offering some strategies to deal with the effects of commodification. McMahon said:

……resisting the commodification of farming and food requires that we think about food as the embodiment of relationships rather than simply as something we eat. A potato isn't just a potato, it carries in it, and into us when we eat, a host of social relationships such as those with the people who grow, harvest, or trade the potato and also with Nature, not in the abstract but with particular nonhuman others, things, and individual places. When we partake in food, we consume relationships. (McMahon, 2002, p. 204)

Building on Marx (1992), who pointed out both the creativity of human labour and its complex interactions with nature and among themselves and how these complexities are rendered invisible as an effect of commodification, McMahon helps us to imagine eating food as inviting those complex socio-ecological relationships that bring those who produce, harvest and trade, earth others, things and places, into us. McMahon has us imagine when we eat food that we also take in socio-ecological relationships surrounding more-than-humans such as the soil that nurtures the food we eat. Even if we simply say soil, it is constituted by multiple species, such as diverse insects and microbes. And air. The oxygen in the air we breathe is produced by algae and plants over geological timeframes which transform the carbon dioxide that, among other sources, we exhale. Do we care about what extreme summer days do to food crops and other species involved in what we eat? Do we know where the food crops, water, air and labour we consume come from and what kind of relationships they become through before and after they are part of us? How are food crops, soils and plants and the diverse socio-ecological webs of relationships that form them dealing with changing climate? Can people in Japan

and Japan's economy deal with changing climate without air conditioning and nuclear power when closer to 90% of the energy needs come from outside (the world's fifth-largest energy consumer in 2022) (ANRE, 2022)? Do we care about how those humans and more-than-human earth others maintain their well-being through a series of natural and human-made disasters including droughts and crop failures? Even though we learn through socialisation to regard ourselves as rational and independent, our body is made of air, food, water and webs of socio-ecological relationships that come with them as well as trillions of bacterial species, and it engages in continuous co-transformation. How do we think ourselves separate from other species and lifeworlds? How do we not experience these interdependent and continuously transforming relationships in our everyday life?

As pointed out by Marx, and as echoed by McMahon, it is a complex web of socio-ecological relationships that contribute to our well-being. When food, labour and other essentials are commodified, we develop blindness to these life-supporting relationships with human and more-than-human species, things and places embedded in their production, circulation and consumption. This blindness, formed through particular epistemological and ontological assumptions supported by unrecognised privileges and commodity fetishism, provides the unseen conditions necessary for us to ignore, to not care about those who nurture, those who become, our well-being. How can we, feminist scholars who study political economy in Japan, cultivate an ethical subjectivity that is capable of listening to minoritised voices, including not only those humans living in sacrifice zones but also the earth others who vastly outnumber the human population? How can we recognise their un- and under-paid labour and unmet needs to better support the production of conditions within which both they and we engage in an economy that meets their and our needs? If we divorce our analysis from our interdependent relationships with nature, we risk an exacerbation of both social inequality and environmental degradation that threatens our co-survival.

To be sure, I do not suggest that we participate in an “Olympics of oppression” (Ishihara & Shimoji, 2022, p. 36), neither among humans nor be-

tween humans and earth others. What I am concerned about is not identifying who is more oppressed or needs more care. I second Mai Ishihara, a feminist anthropologist who studies Indigenous Ainu, and Yoshitaka Lorence Shimoji, a sociologist who studies post-war mixed-race children, who argued for the importance of making continuous noise among those blinded with privileges, those who represent the minority's partial reality without reflexivity in order not to keep forcing those who are rendered as the minority perform care or unpaid labour that comes with emotional, and I add environmental, costs (Ibid.). I know little about Japanese political economy debates and ecological economics. I am in the early stage of exploring what caring economies might mean. My work is in the spirit of exploring and experimenting with some economic possibilities. As postcapitalist feminist J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006) and community economies scholars (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013; Roelvink & Gibson-Graham, 2009) suggest, we read economy for difference, wearing curious glasses. I am sharing this paper, informed by postcapitalist feminist political ecology, to join those who are making noise among privileged feminist political economy scholars in Japan to encourage a subjectivity that is inclined to work towards making economy more caring, more attentive to the care provided by both humans and earth others that is made invisible, the care on which we all depend, the webs of interdependences through which we all are constituted.

Care and Needs-Based Economy

To suggest changes that may enable economy to be more caring, I start from the notions of care consolidated first by philosopher Bernice Fisher and political theorist Joan Tronto (1990, 1993) as further elaborated by Tronto (2013). This evolving understanding of care is often referred to in discussions of care ethics among western feminists and has recently been translated into Japanese in 2024. Fisher and Tronto define care as: “a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” where ‘our world’ means our bodies, our selves, and our environment (1990, p. 40). Their conceptualisation centres on care in human life and sees it as part of basic needs (the underlying

ontological assumptions). Recognising human nature as relational and interdependent, a commonality across humans is understood as everyone needing to receive care. Their conceptualisation was further elaborated (Tronto, 1993; Tronto, 2013), as involving five phases. First, care requires a species that cares about the need to maintain, continue, and repair our world. That is, ‘caring about’ requires a subjectivity that is willing and able to see and attend to unmet needs in a respective world. Once needs are seen and attended to, care then demands a responsible subject: one who does and values their care for the identified unmet needs by coming up with and acting on strategies to meet those needs. Their conceptualization of care does not stop here. Care also involves a subjectivity that ensures that those who are directly involved in care giving have the competencies necessary to perform appropriate care. This care giving needs to be coupled with care receiving: a subjectivity that ensures the effectiveness of the care given for those who receive care to share their responses. Lastly, care requires a subjectivity that ensures caring with all actors, things, and places involved in care processes to ensure that all processes (i.e., identifying needs, coming up with strategies, care giving and care receiving) are done according to agreed values, such as plurality, communication, trust, respect, and solidarity. This last dimension added by Tronto (2013) is a critical reminder for us to pay greater attention to the processes that move us away from saviourism, the state in which we impose our will on our terms in saving others, towards fostering more democratic and reciprocal relationships with those who receive care.

This conceptualisation of care, which is founded on species’ interdependence and the centrality of meeting the basic needs as a collective, is, in my view, not only feminist. It resonates with a Marxian ethic that is captured in the famous slogan popularised by Karl Marx in his 1875 *Critique of Gotta Programme*: “From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs” (“Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seinen Bedürfnissen!”) (1994). It argues for an economy where each performs labour based on their unique ability, and a community that is produced, that comes into being by collectively attending to and taking responsibility for ensuring the fulfilment

of unmet needs through democratically deciding how to distribute the surplus gathered from its members. No one's need should be left unmet. Care as ensuring the fulfilment of needs requires an economy and subjects who perform economic activities that support producing and distributing surplus – resources/wealth – for that purpose. Marxian perspectives are useful in this regard, particularly those that do not juxtapose capitalism as productive and care as reproductive but see care operating in diverse class and non-class processes. Following Marx's identification of five fundamental class structures, Resnick and Wolff (1989) and Resnick, Wolff and Gibson-Graham (2000, 2001) see class as production, appropriation and distribution of surplus and have us attend different classes concurrently pushing and pulling to produce dynamic economies. This inclusive postcapitalist⁽¹⁾ Marxian perspective provides rich insights for conceptualising caring economy on terms that are not limited by the capitalist-as-productive and care-as-reproductive binary, which I further elaborate on below.

Feminist political ecology attends to the human-environment nexus from a feminist perspective. Care ethics, conceptualised by Fisher and Tronto and Marx, are often referred to as discussing human-centred activities. Those who theorise care in the examination of the human-environment nexus, such as Australian environmental philosopher Val Plumwood, and the author of *Matters of Care* Maria Puig de La Bellacasa, on the other hand, help us explore posthumanist, multispecies or interspecies care (hereafter multispecies care), performed in the interdependent relationships between humans and earth others. Multispecies care enables us to see agency in earth others. For example, Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) describes how different species work together to restore soil. It has us recognise agents of care not only humans but also earth others. It is based on a recognition of earth others as caregivers and humans as care receivers from earth others. This recognition may motivate us to meet the needs of earth others to maintain interdependence among species. Plumwood (2008) suggests that we recognise our place constituted through socio-ecological relationships that support our well-being. From this understanding, living in Japan where the food self-sufficiency rate is less than

40% (MAFF, 2023) outside the rapidly depopulating rural areas, the places from which we secure care are scattered across the world, for example, corn, soybean, wheat, beef, vegetables, fruits from USA, Brazil, Canada, Australia, China and ASEAN countries (MAFF, 2022). Plumwood, like aforementioned McMahon, is critical of our commodity regime and describes the effects this commodification as rendering “those parts of the earth that ‘grow [us]’, that support [our] life” (2008), invisible to us. If we are to maintain, repair and continue our worlds, the coupling of human-centered and multispecies care would encourage us to attend to the needs of humans and more-than-human lifeworlds so that we may conceive, take responsibility for and then care for those who, literally, become us.

Caring economies are preliminarily defined as more-than-capitalist and multispecies economies that enable humans and more-than-human lifeworlds to maintain, continue, and repair their/our bodies, them-/our-selves, and their/our environments so that humans and more-than-humans meet their/our *needs* and achieve their/our *well-being* as well as possible, which contributes to collective survival. Following the core values embedded in both Tronto's *Caring Democracy* (2013), postcapitalist Marxists' inclusive economies and multispecies thinking, I call this *caring economies*. Caring economies, by their very nature, motivate us to see, value and care for the needs of those actors, things, and places that are involved in the production of ourselves, our well-being and the socio-ecological relationships between humans and those earth others. If our interest in knowing their needs has been not yet cultivated, we cannot see let alone attend to them nor take responsibility for coming up with strategies to meet their and our unmet needs. Climate change and environmental degradation derive not only from colonisation and capitalist economies but also from our indifference and inability to see interdependence. If feminists who study political economy in Japan are interested in exploring the interdependent relationships between human economy and natural lifeworlds, an initial move would be to cultivate an ethical subjectivity that is capable of seeing and being curious about exploring our connections to those actors, things, and places that nurture us, that become us, so that we can care about each other for co-survival.

Toward Caring Economies: Postcapitalist Feminist Political Ecology Strategies

For this preliminary exploration, I propose two postcapitalist feminist political ecology strategies.

Strategy one: From capitalocentric to diverse economies

As a postcapitalist Marxist and feminist who is increasingly concerned about human-lifeworlds collective survival, I am uneasy with the prevalent tendency to identify care as reproductive and feminine which is set in contrast and made subordinate to productive labour which is seen as masculine. From a Marxist perspective, productive labour is that which produces surplus. Surplus, what is left after the labour required for meeting the basic needs of the labourer, is used to take care of unmet needs in the community from which the labourer comes. Care, enabled by surplus, is often considered part of the social processes by which this world is reproduced. In this context, care as part of social reproduction enables the ongoing production of the human capacity to live which includes performing productive labour. Care is rarely considered productive in itself. Activities typically classified as care, such as cooking, human care, and community volunteer work, are seen as un- or under-paid, labour that is often not exchanged in a market and is often performed by women and minorities. This hierarchical paid-as-productive-thus-more-valued vs unpaid-as-unproductive-thus-less-valued view that feminists repeatedly brought into their analysis is shaped by male- and capitalist-centered ideologies that unwittingly privilege paid labour. Feminist analysis that does not problematise this binary risks its reproduction. What is also problematic is that this paid work is often silently assumed to be capitalist wage labour which is relationally constructed as opposite to care as social reproduction. This rarely articulated assumption, stemming from class-blind analyses, provides conditions within which capitalist hegemony, which must be challenged to open a space for resignifying care, most unfortunately thrives.

One proven effective way to challenge capitalist hegemony is to un-

derstand and report the effects of the economic essentialism that naturalises placing capitalism in the centre of economic thinking, which Gibson-Graham, the pen name for two Marxist feminist human geographers, called capitalocentrism. Through the lens of this capitalocentrism, all economic practices are seen as being fundamentally the same as (or modeled upon) capitalism, or as being deficient or substandard imitations; as being opposite to capitalism; as being the complement of capitalism; as existing in capitalism's space or orbit (Gibson-Graham, 1996, p. 6).

Gibson-Graham's critique of capitalocentric economic essentialism is inspired by the articulation of what queer literary critic Eve Sedgwick called "Christmas effects" (1993). According to Sedgwick, conversation topics and advertisements in our everyday life proliferate and increasingly get organised around Christmas as it approaches and this very build in attention normalises, and increases, the centrality of Christmas. Sedgwick finds this same self-reinforcing focus around heteronormativity in its repetitive performative representational practices in our everyday life, including our academic practices. Applying Sedgwick's insight, Gibson-Graham's capitalocentrism enables us to see and then encourages us to reflect on repetitive performative representational practices that keep capitalism the natural centre of our economic thinking and practices. For example, through a capitalocentric lens, there is no problem with using GDP to measure economy, nor is it odd to call societies 'capitalist' despite this rendering non-capitalist and unpaid care and other labour invisible. Capitalocentrism is also seen in the normalisation of cultural expressions that celebrate the success of capitalists or capitalist companies and it encourages people to want to work at capitalist enterprises, where people do not have a say in the use of the fruits of their labour. Gibson-Graham has us ask, in our academic teaching and writing, how are care and/or social reproduction (e.g., unpaid household labour) described? Are they presented in terms of class processes? Are they recognised as labour? If so, in comparison with capitalist wage labour, how are they (not) distinguished from capitalist class processes?

Even though Marx identified five fundamental class structures, name-

ly (primitive) communist, independent, slavery, feudal, and capitalist, historical materialism has taught us that one class structure becomes dominant in each historical time. Together with other schools of economic thought that are class blind, this orthodox Marxist premise has us focus on capitalism, capitalist class structures, capitalist enterprises, capitalist labour, capitalist transactions, and capitalist finance at the expense of the presence, the interdependence of those capitalist processes with a diversity of non-capitalist economic processes. Capitalocentrism coupled with class blindness makes the economic contributions made by minoritised people (incl. women) and earth others invisible when those contributions are found in non-capitalist class processes. Their contributions to the maintenance of our world through diverse transactions (e.g., alternative market and non-market), through diverse labour (e.g., unpaid, indentured, slave, communal), enterprises (e.g., cooperative) and diverse finance (e.g., informal lending) are only visible insofar as they are detectably capitalist. When these economic activities are measured on terms capitalism sets, these contributions are typically measured in cash (where more pay is more value). This makes many contributions invisible, such as the non-remunerated care performed by both humans and others. From a capitalocentric perspective, a sound strategy to meet the needs of these people and lifeworlds would be the calculation and cash payment for their contributions which would place these activities in the hierarchically set economic worlds where capitalist logics rule. The effects of climate change, studies show, will be experienced more severely among minoritised people and earth others who are paid less than by those with privileges so their disproportionate losses, on these capitalocentric terms, matter less. It is urgent for (feminist) scholars to attend to and care for the needs of minoritised people and earth others in times of climate change that is caused by economic activities that are found sensible within colonialism, capitalism and other frames that naturalised the privileged's indifference to those to whom they are interdependently bound.

Moving away from capitalocentrism requires that we wither away the ritual, the naturalised capitalocentric performative acts that secure capitalist centrality and, instead, choose performative acts that provide conditions with-

in which humans and the diversity of earth others with whom we are interdependent may care well for and survive well together. Informed by Gibson-Graham and feminist political ecology, I propose that we learn to see how diverse economies performed by minoritised people and earth others interact with the economies that nurture us in our respective lives. Since the 1990s academic feminists, western and beyond, have learned critically to recognise differences among women and to perform intersectional analyses which are sensitive to differences within those studied that bring about more just transformations. Seeing women as all the same is now less prevalent, thanks to these concerted efforts by feminists to naturalise the idea that women are diverse. In the same manner, to put an end to capitalocentrism, learning to see economy as heterogenous, and not to see an entire economy or society, as monolithically capitalist, is crucial if we are to see the spaces in which we may create opportunities to nurture caring socio-ecological relationships.

For those who study feminist political economy, critical discussion of women's and minoritised people's unpaid house and community work, work that is normally seen as part of social reproduction, provides an illustrative example. From the capitalocentric perspective, in which paid labour is the exemplar of productive, the work that women and other minoritised people do caring for others is often classed as reproductive. Because this labour is poorly or even unpaid, those who render it are seen to be exploited. This exploitation is often attributed to the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy, both of which are recognised as living parasitically off women's and other minoritised people's unpaid labour. This perspective recognises commodified labour as natural and value as determined through market-based exchange. This same labour is recognised as producing use value when seen through a lens informed by a combination of the Marxist and the feminist perspectives introduced above. This labour maintains, continues, and repairs human and more-than-human life-worlds – that are realised in their consumption. In Marxist theory, this labour produces surplus and all surplus-producing labour is, by definition, productive even if its products are not exchanged in a market or otherwise monetised. Here, productivity is determined not by the monetised

exchange value but by the surplus that is used to meet collective needs, needs that go beyond mere fulfilment of individual needs. That said, labour, unpaid or otherwise, that does not produce surplus, that does not maintain, continue, and repair our collective world, is also recognised as productive because the Marxist definition of productivity is, precisely, the production of surplus. That is, extractivist industrial capitalist wage, feudal or slave labour that produce surplus are all seen as productive albeit exploitative insofar as surplus is appropriated by somebody other than the labourer who produced it (Resnick & Wolff, 1989)⁽²⁾. Here, feminists and posthumanists diverge from orthodox Marxists in our understanding of what counts as productive in caring (Barca, 2019; Barca et al., 2023): labour that values species, that maintains, continues, and repairs our world. The lessons here are in recognising care not only as reproductive but also as surplus producing *productive* labour that contributes to collective well-being.

The above insights help us resignify care, but they do not tell us about the diversity of class processes that may be found outside of those visible through a capitalocentric lens, where class is conceptualised as processes of production, appropriation and distribution of surplus. Even if care is identified as reproductive, no one class process is characteristic of this labour. Care, whether it is paid or unpaid, from a non-capitalocentric and class-literate perspective, is found in all class processes. Within a household where a patriarchal hierarchy rules, when the surplus produced by a household member is appropriated by a head of the household, say the senior adult man, this care labour is done in feudal class processes. The appropriation of the surplus of this labour by a hierarchical superior is made possible by mutual acceptance of the rights and obligations borne of familial obligation. Outside of the family, yet still within a feudal class process, care may be performed by an indentured labourer, perhaps a migrant nanny, whose service is secured through debt bondage. This also applies to a care labourer whose service is paid through room and board. Shifting to a new class process, the number of single-person households is growing in Japan (nearly 40% due to the increasing number of households headed by single old people). In this case, when the

individual head of households appropriates and distributes their own surplus this is understood as an independent class process. It would also be independent class processes when the labourer (e.g., a single parent) with a dependent (e.g., a child) appropriates and distributes their own surplus. Wives within heterosexual relationships may appropriate and distribute their own surplus if their self-identified agency is recognised and respected by themselves and others (Cameron, 1996). Care can certainly be performed also in communal class processes. For example, household members, blood-related or not, may collectively decide on how to distribute the surplus collectively produced. Finally, if a household purchases care as a service and the hired labourer works for a wage for a capitalist enterprise, then the care as commodity is performed within capitalist class processes. To be sure, care as commodity purchased to fulfil household care needs is performed in a variety of class processes. This same externally purchased care can be performed within an independent class process, when it is performed by a self-employed worker, within a capitalist class process, when performed by a wage labourer, within a feudal process, when performed by an indentured labourer, and within a communal process when performed by a member of a producer cooperative. Finally, if an individual is owned and forced to perform care labour without their will and their surplus is appropriated by the owner, conditions found in prisons and brothels, then this care labour is done in slave class processes.

The previous paragraphs have described care labour performed in a household from the perspective of diverse class processes. The examples briefly mentioned relate to household care labour only. This diverse class perspective is equally productive when applied to other care work, such as sex work (van der Veen, 2001). Once we move away from capitalocentrism and class blindness it becomes possible to see conditions unique to each class process. Within this perspective, out of the five class processes, the care performed in feudal, capitalist and slave class processes are, by definition, exploitative, while that in independent and communal class processes are not. Marxian insights help us qualify different types of exploitation and class just care in our everyday lives. Feminist theory enriches this perspective through the in-

roduction of intersectionality which supports recognition of the diverse and possibly contradictory directions of situated intersectional power dynamics, within which care labour is performed (e.g., Nakamura & Sato, 2023; Sato & Soto Alarcón, 2019). The recognition of intersectionality has the potential to transform the understanding that capitalism lives off of unpaid reproductive labour and exploits labourers who perform care. Intersectionality directs us to come up with concrete strategies to eliminate those conditions that support unjust practices which inhibit care and, rather, to foster conditions that support non-exploitative forms of care labour. Intersectionality also helps us resignify care as productive labour that enables the maintenance, continuation and repair of our everyday worlds and the labourers as valuable agents.

Strategy two: From anthropocentric to multispecies economies

Strategy one has us become critical of capitalocentrism and class blindness and their effect on our economic thinking. It focuses on having us recognise care not only as reproductive but also as productive and develop a postcapitalist diverse economies' perspective. This strategy provides us with the tools required to see the world beyond capitalocentrism and, within that broadened scope, diminish the centrality of that lens in shaping our understandings. This postcapitalist perspective would motivate us to lay foundations for our discovery of new paths forward, paths that acknowledge minoritised people's contributions to our collective survival and that recognise the agency of the now invisible while retaining sensitivity to intersecting social differences. Strategy two looks beyond the human communities. This second strategy asks us to see and question the anthropocentrism that puts humans in the centre of every discussion. It has us recognise care as inter- and multi-species activities and develop a multispecies perspective. A multispecies perspective, as used here, does not mean that we claim to see the world through the lens of other species. Plumwood, who pointed out our places as places that nurture our everyday lives and our interdependent relationships with more-than-human lifeworlds, proposes the following:

We can as humans indeed recognise ourselves in nature, and not only as we do when it has been colonised, commodified and domesticated, made into a mirror which reflects back only our own species' images and our own needs. We can instead recognise in the myriad forms of nature other beings – earth others – whose needs, goals and purposes, like our own, be acknowledged and respected. (Plumwood, 1993, p. 137)

Our perspectives inevitably belong to us. To recognize ourselves in nature, Plumwood suggests that we learn to recognise earth others' needs, goals and purposes and to integrate our educated recognition of them into our perspective without privileging our own. Applying the 'caution thinking' of Ishihara and Shimoji (2022) that points to the negative effects of ignoring the Other's unpaid labour on the Other, we are encouraged to reflect on our own privileges and positionalities when trying to study and represent earth others' realities. Feminists who study political economy have made theoretical advancements by integrating an intersectional perspective to illuminate differential socio-economic acts enacted by minoritized women and their effects on social relations in the last three decades. Yet, this perspective is still often human-centered. For humans to survive well, humans need to survive well together with the myriad forms of earth others. As suggested by McMahon, Plumwood and Tronto among others, care requires us to see how all life, our own included, is interdependent with that of others. Whether or not our anthropocentrism allows us to see this interdependence, the harm done to them is our own. When their needs are unmet, we are unlikely to be able to attend to their needs and take responsibility with them for our joint survival. Or worse, we may risk continuously providing conditions within which humans see earth others as narrowly useful, as exploitable, rather than as interdependently constituting our shared world.

Both feminist care and Marxian ethics share the ontological assumption that humans are interdependent. This second strategy extends this recognition to earth others. While feminist political economy scholars may be at the forefront of recognising interdependence within the human family, we only

rarely recognise the interdependence between humans and earth others. Just as thinking in terms of male-headed households blinded previous scholars to women, limiting our focus to human portions of the economies through which we subsist, seeing our economies as superior to or only extracting from those of earth others, makes it difficult to see earth others as anything other than simply conceived exploitable resources. Shifting our perspective from anthropocentric to multispecies economies involves developing a new analytical skill set. Paralleling the work of those scholars who began to see women in all our heterogeneity, I suggest that we cultivate an ethical subjectivity that extends our view to the interdependent relationships between human economies and those of earth others by learning to 1) see economy as ecology, 2) develop a more-than-human intersectionality, and 3) take into account effects of colonialism.

Ecological livelihoods, articulated by Roelvink and Gibson-Graham (2009), Gibson-Graham and Miller (2015) and further elaborated by Miller (2020), suggest we recognise economy as ecology and ecology as economy, interdependent relationships between the two. Looking from our human side, Marx presented labour as humans' creative capacity to transform nature using muscle, brain and, feminists added, emotion over time as precious productive resources. Looking from the nonhuman side through this ecological livelihoods lens, earth others certainly transform our world, just as humans have roles in human economies. This conceptualisation enables us to imagine diverse earth others' activities as interacting economies, such as bumblebee economies and tomato plant economies, intersecting with human economies through which all parties produce respective livelihoods. McMahon, quoted earlier, also embeds this interdependent understanding of ecology as economy and economy as ecology in her suggestion that we recognise the consumption of food as the consumption of a host of socio-ecological relationships.

Retaining labour as the red thread from the previous section, these multispecies economies are recognisable through Marxist understandings of dead and living labour (Marx, 1993). Marx saw a sequence of creative human and more-than-human labour embedded in the transformations wrought on

things. A food crop is, for Marx, an effect of a series of dead and living labour. Dead labour is performed by the labourers who made, for example, the tools that a farmer, performing living labour, uses to produce the crop. Immediately after it is performed, the living labour of the farmer becomes dead labour embodied in that crop. From this perspective, the crop is produced through a sequence in which each inheritor's contribution wraps the dead labour of their predecessors in their own living labour. From an anthropocentric perspective, the crop embodies, for example, the labour performed by humans who transformed, for example, the soil, seeds, tools, and paperwork. These notions of dead and living labour resonate with Tronto's vision of care as nesting on each other (2013) in a manner that founds a relational ontology. From a multispecies perspective, earth others (e.g., microbes, algae, bumblebees, human microbiota) are part of this nesting dynamic (see Driessen, 2024; Miller, 2020; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). This vision has us see continuous co-transformations of multispecies economies nesting within each other.

The discussion thus far in this section has focused on the multispecies production of livelihoods within which earth others are recognized as performing labour. While this labour might not immediately be recognised as care, it is essential in maintaining, continuing and repairing our world. As demonstrated repeatedly, for example by Hiroshima and Nagasaki (nuclear bombs), Minamata and Teshima (illegal dumping), and Fukushima (radioactive leaks), humans alone are unable to repair our lifeworld. Our world requires multispecies care. Although care labour performed by different species is pervasive, takes diverse forms and occurs over diverse timeframes, it is most often overlooked in our very human analyses. Looking beyond the exploitation of human labour, industrial farming often violently strains soils, plants, insects and animals. We, feminists studying political economy, persistently argue for the reconsideration of women's and minoritised people's unpaid and undervalued labour. This same oversight blinds analysis to the forced unpaid labour performed by myriads of earth others whose labour and economies in interaction produce our well-being.

Even if we were able to recognise earth others' agency, labour and

unmet needs and, with this recognition, we became willing to attend to their needs, historically developed power dynamics shape human-nature interactions. Feminist political economy scholars have found intersectionality makes it possible to see hierarchical heterogeneity within our human communities in ways that provide foundations for arguments towards more just and caring economies. This same construct may be useful in extending our analytical gaze to earth others. Attention to the nexus between humans and more-than-human lifeworlds, feminist political ecology and posthumanist approaches provide tools that make it possible to rethink intersectionality. Feminist political ecology's intersectionality, by definition, considers more-than-human aspects. Its intersectionality sheds light on how social differences intersect with ecological contexts, including ecological agents, spaces and places, often at different scales, stemming from interdisciplinary geography where feminist political ecology thrives. For example, in a Kenyan village where the Millennium Development Project was piloted, ecological agents (e.g., hybrid seeds, ecological materials used for farming rituals, seasonality and changing regional climate) and social differences (e.g., gender, social status within polygamous households, wealth, knowledge from MDP training and livelihood strategies) interacted to shape inter- and intra-household food (in) security (Kimanthi et al., 2022). Posthumanist intersectionality asks us to constantly reflect on our human-centered perspectives. From a posthumanist perspective, Puig de la Bellacasa's study on soil care (2017) reminds us of the different timescales relevant to species. Also, from a posthumanist queer ecology's perspective informed by nonbinary sexuality among nonhuman species (Sandilands & Erickson, 2010), we learn to see how sexes of other species transform over a life course or in a specific space in interaction with their environment (Fukunaga, in this issue). Posthumanist multispecies perspectives caution us to refrain from imposing human-centered measurements and judgements. Without this reflexivity, we risk ignoring the contributions and agency of earth others and this oversight would provide conditions for their narrow utilitarian objectification and an insensitive exploitation that risks their, and ultimately our own, death.

Caring economies should not maintain and continue the interlocking hierarchical power relations, such as man vs women, capitalism vs noncapitalism, master vs slave, and human vs nature. Thus far my suggested strategies have us focus on a closer look at the human-environmental nexus using analytical tools relating to labour and intersectionality that are already familiar to scholars of feminist political economy. As we found in the statement for the common topics at the 2024 JAFFE conference, the geological epoch of the Anthropocene is thought of as the epoch when humanity started to have great effects on the Earth's ecosystem, including human-induced climate change. Also, Kohei Saito (2023), a Japanese Marxist environmental philosopher among others, has critically engaged with the concept so that it might be already familiar to some Japanese feminist political economy scholars. Yet, Jason Moore (2016) and others have pointed out the problem of undifferentiating human activities in the conceptualisation of the Anthropocene. They find that the Anthropocene makes invisible the fact that not all humans equally produce negative effects on the ecosystem. To highlight the differentiated effects, Anna Tsing, an anthropologist, and Donna Haraway, a feminist science and technology scholar (Haraway et al., 2016), proposed the notion of a Plantationocene, the epoch that enables us to pay critical attention to differentiated processes initiated by colonialism that include intersecting effects of the introduction of plantations through forced relocation of humans, plants and animals, globalised capitalism, and racism that have produced detrimental effects on the ecosystem. Caring economies involve thinking of political economy in relation to environmental issues in the Plantationocene, which keeps us critical of the reproduction of the historically developed master vs slave, human vs nature, and racial hierarchical power dynamics across geological time and national borders. This thinking motivates us to integrate our analysis not only with the intersecting effects of gender and capitalism. It seriously asks us to situate our analysis in relation to the effects of colonialism, such as colonial land reforms, monoculture that enslaved and exploited humans and other species, racism, extractivism, pollutions and diseases. Importantly, it requires that we account for our own formation, privileges and disadvantages that we

have inherited from colonialism.

I opened this paper by asking who has been harmed by the prolonged extremely hot summer days in part produced by anthropogenic climate change. Those privileged who live in cities and enjoy air-conditioned lifestyles. This comfort is not disconnected from Japan's past and present colonialism of the Ainu, Ryukyuan, Korean territories and beyond. Thinking of political economy in relation to environmental issues in the Plantationocene pushes us to learn to see connections between Japan's colonialism and our everyday life: for example, connecting normally invisible dots among, the history of colonial expansion, energy, food and national securities, the expansion of plantations, fertiliser and gunpowder production, Chisso, Minamata and similar Korean Hungnam diseases, the expansion of plastic consumption, the US military presence, nuclear power plants, commodification of the Ainu and the Ryukyuan, and abundant lifestyles that some of us enjoy. However, this exercise should be done with care. Ishihara's (2024) self-reflexive analysis of how she thought of people suffering from Minamata disease prior to her in-person visit to Minamata provides a critical insight: Doing this analytical exercise cognitively alone leaves the privileged scholars not seeing experiences of bodies, species and places that are in pain. This privileged scholars' blindness in embodied experiences of pain and even death makes it possible for care or unpaid labour that comes with emotional and environmental costs and death borne by those in pain to be not adequately cared for.

Ishihara's insight echoes Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian historian and political theorist, who would also think doing this analytical exercise cognitively alone would not disrupt the master-slave hierarchical power dynamics. In his *Necropolitics* (2019) Mbembe's strategy for disrupting the master-slave hierarchical power dynamics is for both those who dominate and those who are subordinated in the master-slave hierarchical power dynamics "recognizing and accepting vulnerability – or even admitting that to live is always to live exposed, including to death" (p. 176). For Mbembe, a reciprocal recognition of vulnerability, "beginning with that of the body exposed to suffering and degeneration" (p. 175) is a necessary ethical condition for humanity. From a

multispecies perspective, some earth others are also seen to share the slave subject position. Even though we may not expect earth others to engage in this reciprocity head-to-head with humans, insights from Ishihara, Mbembe and Plumwood urge the privileged scholars to cultivate a subjectivity capable of being affected by experiences of bodies, species and places that are exposed to pain and death.

Situating political economy in the Plantationocene enables us to see privileges and comfortable lifestyles that are differentially enjoyed by diverse humans in “abundance zones” as relational effects of colonialism. It motivates us to make visible connections between privileges and comfortable lifestyles and social, emotional and environmental costs borne by humans, other species and their lifeworlds in places including “sacrifice zones” where social and environmental harms are disproportionately experienced (Ishihara, 2020; Juskus, 2023). Shifting our perspective from anthropocentric to multispecies economies needs to be coupled with taking this recognition of the colonial past and present that maintains and continues the interlocking hierarchical power relations through racism and anthropocentrism.

Preliminary Concluding Thoughts

In this paper I offered strategies to shift our perspectives: 1) from capitalocentric to diverse economies and 2) from anthropocentric to multispecies economies to cultivate an ethical subjectivity that is curious about and able to explore our connections to those actors, things, and places that nurture us, so that we, through our analyses, enable economies that care for one another in mutual survival by building on the assumed skill sets we have already developed. Thinking of Tronto's conceptualisation of care with feminist political ecology, posthumanist and decolonial thoughts, we recognise “caring with” as ensuring moral qualities of plurality, communication, trust, respect, and solidarity (Tronto, 2013) practised among human and more-than-human agents across different practices of care (i.e., caring about, caring for, care giving, and care receiving) in historically developed power dynamics. To conclude, I share three interrelated thoughts that should be taken into account for us to

better cultivate a subjectivity that practices “caring with”.

First, I suggest continuously engaging in reflecting on one's positionality and the blindspots that come with the privileges supported by commodity fetishism. The authors I referred to earlier, Ishihara and Plumwood, in my view practice “caring with” and give us some specific cautions. Ishihara and Plumwood ask us to develop a reflexive subjectivity that questions whether our practice is projecting our own images of the Other (e.g., earth others, the Ainu, people in Minamata) while framing the Other based on our needs. What they are concerned by is representations of the other created by and for the privileged for their own gain. This was well captured by US-based Black feminist bell hooks (1992) as “eating the Other”, an irresponsible representational practice that commodifies and celebrates the Other without recognising the Other's unequal inheritance of processes, like colonialism and racism, that have benefited us. To prevent problematic and oft-unrecognised representational practices that produce uncaring hierarchical socio-ecological relationships, Plumwood proposed that we learn to acknowledge and respect the “needs, goals and purposes” of the Other, be they minoritised humans or earth others. To do so Ishihara and Mbembe ask us to recognise the Other's pain and death and simultaneously our own vulnerability so we do not reproduce master-slave and other hierarchical power dynamics. We have learned to see how patriarchy and capitalism affect not only men and women differentially in our analysis but also us in our own realities. The insight from Ishihara and Mbembe has us turn our gaze back to us and learn to see our formation through colonialism, racism and burdening others with the environmental costs of our decisions. Critically recognising problems affecting as also our own, and, with this recognition accepting the vulnerability that comes with public acknowledgement that we are complicit provides conditions that begin to create a reciprocal engagement.

Second, to recognise the embodied experiences of the Other and ourselves we need to explore how to enhance our senses to be able to learn to be affected. If we continue to focus only on the cognitive, only on knowledge, we risk missing the Other's embodied struggles and are more likely to push

our emotions aside while doing research. My personal strategies to cultivate a subjectivity that learns to imagine multispecies interdependence and care are, open and curious observations of interactions between species and between species and humans and others for example, reading books (including non-academic and children's books), attending talks and workshops, watching films and video clips, listening to podcasts, joining demonstrations, visiting museums, taking guided tours and having informal chats with those people who closely work with minoritized people and more-than-human species. *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (2002) alerts us about the detrimental effects of pesticides on humans and lifeworlds and *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) illuminates earth others' generous gift economies from Indigenous perspectives. We could explore, for example, *Kugaijōdo* by Michiko Ishimure (1972), *Fukugōosen* by Sawako Ariyoshi (2014), novel *Kōkun* by Nahoko Uehashi (2022) and children's book *Kakijisan to Shigebō* story by Shigeatsu Hatakeyama (2005) among others, to enhance our corporeal senses to learn to recognise multispecies interdependence and care. Again, this training ourselves to learn to be affected must come with reflexivity. Ishihara (2024), even after she did some homework, including reading *Kugaijōdo*, before her visit to Minamata, still recognised her blindspots. Ishihara suggests that those who approach the Other and attempt to represent the Other need to train ourselves to recognise how the gaze of the Other looks back at us so that we carry a feeling of tension with us. Practising this recognition, thinking with Mbembe, might be a way of recognising our vulnerability and learning to expose our vulnerability to the Other in reciprocity.

Last, echoing scholars like Haraway and Ishihara, I propose that we learn to tell a different story, which requires not only a different content (a combination of analysis that connects invisible dots and embodied life stories) but also a different methodology. Less than a week before the JAFFE conference, I visited Minamata for one day. I took a guided tour at the Minamata Disease Museum and attended a joint talk about seeing Minamata disease through eating food (*Taberu-karamiru Minamata-byo*) by Tatsushi Fujiwara, an agrarian and environmental historian teaching at Kyoto University, and Ri-

miko Yoshinaga, a local story-teller of experiences of Minamata Disease. My thinking mind was stimulated by the historical and transnational connections of fertilisers, Minamata disease, colonialism, and wars and beyond skillfully presented by Fujiwara. On the other hand, the lived life stories of Yoshinaga sparked my embodied imaginations about children's joys of playing on the beach and eating seasonal offerings from the sea while picturing shining reflections of the sun on the sea surface and what effects the loss of sea smells due to the landfill that covered the contaminated sludge had on Yoshinaga's beloved family and community members and earth others. The combination of this visit and talk in addition to what I learned from reading books helped to sharpen my motivation to enable caring economies. Learning to tell a different story requires different methodologies. For example, we may want to consider a transdisciplinary forum or dialogue that does not privilege academic knowledge and that values lived perspectives. Learning to tell a different story differently and exploring a transdisciplinary dialogue requires a subjectivity that is curious and willing to explore and experiment with economic possibilities, fostering a hybrid collective together with academics, lay researchers and earth others (Cameron et al., 2014).

Joining those who are making noise among privileged feminist political economy scholars in Japan, I offered two analytical strategies, shifting our perspectives from capitalocentric to diverse economies and from anthropocentric to multispecies economies. These were to be coupled with engaging in reflexivity, learning to be affected by the vulnerabilities of others and ours and learning to tell different stories differently. I did so to encourage a subjectivity that is inclined to work towards making economy more caring, more attentive to the care provided by both humans and earth others that is made invisible, the care on which we all depend, the webs of interdependences through which we all are constituted. What I offered does not exhaust the available strategies in any way. They, more, indicate a direction that we may explore together. Adopting these strategies and others will enable us to continuously and reflexively read economy for difference while wearing curious glasses that incline us to work towards making our economy more caring.

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【Notes】

- (1) To be sure, post in a postcapitalist perspective is not about temporality: not about 'after' capitalism. It is about anti-capitalocentrism, that is, about seeing diverse economies, in which capitalism is one among many.
- (2) In Marxist theory, unproductive labour is labour that does not produce surplus. For example, the labour performed by a household member to manage the flow of household resources does not produce surplus even if their management provides conditions for the existence of productive labour. This labour does not produce a new surplus, yet it is a necessary condition to maintain, continue, and repair household relationships. From a Marxist perspective, productive and unproductive labour are recognised as interdependent. They provide conditions for each other. They, thus, are (at least theoretically) non-hierarchical.

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