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Exploring How Commoning Helps Reconfigure Feminist Analytical Tools in Times of Socio-ecological Crises

Chizu Sato*

Commoning, the processes of the production of community through collective management of a commons, is widely practiced in Japan, but commoning, as an analytic, is rarely used by feminist scholars in Japan. It is forecasted that Japan's demographic transition combined with the wave of conservative politics will both threaten existing commoning activities and impose negative commons on large segments of the population. This essay explores the productivity of the analytic of commoning, which derives from postcapitalist community economies and feminist political ecology for our times of socio-ecological crises. Drawing on a case study of older women's entrepreneurial activities in rural Japan, I make connections between commoning and concepts such as gender, intersectionality, economy, community care, agency, and transformation, which are already familiar analytical tools of feminist scholars in Japan. Commoning increases the visibility of productive but often overlooked dimensions. I discuss how reconfiguring the conceptual tools we use to include commoning makes it possible to see new potential paths towards transformations from exploitative, patriarchal and extractive to less exploitative and more just socio-ecological relations in our times of socio-ecological crises.

Keywords: Commoning, feminist political ecology, postcapitalism, community economies, negative commons

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, commoning, as both a practice and an analytic, has gathered attention from leftist activists and scholars for its transformative potential. While commoning has only gained attention recently, the notion of commons has been well used since the early 1990s. Within Western academic feminist circles, commons have been one focus for those who study the human-environment nexus, examining gendered struggles over commons or, more specifically, common pool resources, informed by Ostrom's institutionalist approach (1990). Before current uses of commoning, the processes through which community is produced by collective management of a commons, gained analytical currency in the early 2010s, the term was used in the context of social reproduction (e.g., care work, housework) and that notion of commoning was actively called for during the 1970s' Wages for Housework campaign by Autonomist Marxist Feminists such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa (1988) and Silvia Federici (2012). In the 2010s, the entry of degrowth as a social movement and an academic field saw the current understanding of commoning as affording strategies for transformations towards degrowth.

* Wageningen University

Community economies scholars Gibson-Graham et al. (2016) integrated Peter Linebaugh's (2008) suggestion that we see commons not as an object, a commons, but as activity – commoning – into their postcapitalist project of reading property for difference. The work of Gibson-Graham was introduced to feminist political ecology in the late 2010s in a special issue in the *International Journal of the Commons*.

Commoning as an analytic is not yet widely used by feminist scholars in Japan. This was despite the study of Iriai (入会), collective management of the environment, being of sufficient presence within Japan and interest internationally to hold the IASC conference in Japan in 2013. Around the same time, through contact with a number of feminists who were members of the Japan Association for Feminist Economics, I also learned that feminist political economy scholars in Japan were interested in exploring the human-environment nexus and Marxism. Based on my limited knowledge, neither feminist political ecology (with the exception of Aya Kimura) nor community economies were well-studied in Japan. My own interest in commoning stimulated me to explore the analytical potential of commons and commoning for the reconfiguration of feminist analytical tools from a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective in support of transforming patriarchy, capitalism and the human-environment nexus in times of socio-ecological crises.

Drawing on the case studies of women's entrepreneurial activities in rural Japan (Nakamura and Sato 2023; Sato et al. 2025), in this essay I discuss commoning in the context of negative commons, which is an externally or structurally imposed (unwelcome) practice, knowledge or property. For example, the destruction of a commons produced when organic waste management was commodified (Mies and Benholdt-Thomsen 2001) and the impacts produced by radiation contamination from the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster (Kohso 2012, 2020), both of which disrupted previously existing socio-ecological ties that bound, and which affected the formation of a community. Commoning negative commons is an activity by a diverse population coming together to collectively manage negative commons. While negative commons are often seen in environmentally and socially hazardous conditions, the case study backing this essay enables us to see the commoning practices of a rural population negatively affected by a combination of industrialisation, urbanisation, depopulation, aging, state policy, environmental degradation and people's desire, among others. From a perspective that is informed by feminist ethics of care that sees 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" (Fisher and Tronto 1990, 40) where 'our world' means our bodies, our selves and our environment, this commoning through collective maintenance, continuation and repair of the negative commons is a form of caring. It is forecast that Japan's demographic transition combined with the wave of conservative politics will both threaten existing commoning activities and impose negative commons on large segments of the population. Ways of understanding mutual care that are independent of the desirability of change in circumstances are thus particularly important. In this essay, I use commons, negative commons and commoning in combination with familiar concepts, gender, intersectionality, economy, community, care, agency and transformation, from a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective to better situate commons and commoning in relation to

existing analytical tools of feminist scholars in Japan.

Below, I first briefly introduce my postcapitalist feminist political ecology approach to commons and commoning and, from that perspective, I identify six sets of analytical problematics I often encounter in current feminist analytical tools. Drawing examples mainly from a case study from rural Japan, I then explore how reconfiguring the analytical tools we use to include an understanding of commoning that accommodates negative commons may help increase the visibility of productive but often overlooked dimensions. I conclude the essay with a discussion of new potential paths towards transformations from exploitative and patriarchal to less exploitative and more equal and socio-ecologically just relations in times of socio-ecological crises.

II. THE POSTCAPITALIST FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY APPROACH

The approach to commons and commoning presented in this essay is shaped by two strands of scholarship: community economies and feminist political ecology. While commoning is increasingly discussed by feminists who have examined the human-environment nexus over the last decades, these feminist scholars, including those of feminist political ecology, until recently, have tended to conceptualise commons as common pool resources (Ostrom 1990). Their analyses make visible gendered struggles over common pool resources, which are most often biophysical, such as land, forest or water (e.g., Agarwal 1994). In these analyses, ownership is seen as a critical point for women to struggle over in their efforts to sustain their livelihoods. On the other hand, within the community economies approach, a commons is defined as a knowledge, a practice or a property that is collectively managed by a community (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013, 2016). This conceptualisation puts an emphasis on the co-constitution of commons and community. It resonates with Federici and Mies, who repeated, "no commons without a community," that is also to say, no community without a commons. Where a community is produced, a commons that is collectively managed by the community co-exists. A commons is seen as the heart of a community. A community is not pre-given. It is understood as being produced and reproduced through collectively and repetitively nurturing a commons.

To capture the ongoing practices through which a community is produced, such as those articulated by Linebaugh (2008), commons is understood as an activity – commoning. Commoning (Table 1) is the collection of activities that produce and reproduce a community through perpetual practices of collectively negotiating access, use, benefit, care and responsibility (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016, 196) of a commons. When the access, use and benefit of a knowledge, a practice or a property is narrow or unrestricted, commoning is a process of making it more widely accessed and managed, and while its benefits, its care and responsibilities for it are assumed by a few people or even nobody, commoning is making these practices more widely shared. Commoning also occurs when a commons is already collectively managed, a process of maintaining access, use, benefits, care and responsibility. Commoning may occur regardless of types of ownership.

Feminists who pay attention to gendered commoning remind us that commoning is always performed in historically developed power dynamics. Feminist political ecology keeps our attention on situated gendered power dynamics that push and pull commoning, involving the

Table 1 Ways of commoning

	Access	Use	Benefit	Care	Responsibility	Ownership
Commoning enclosed resources	Narrow	Restricted by owner	Private	Performed by owner or employee	Assumed by owner	Private individual Private collective State
Maintaining commons or creating new commons	Shared and wide	Managed by a community	Widely distributed to a community and beyond	Performed by community members	Assumed by a community	Private individual Private collective State Open access
Commoning unmanaged resources	Unrestricted	Open and unregulated	Finders keeper	None	None	Open access State

Gibson-Graham et al. (2016, 197)

human-environment nexus in multiple directions. Theoretically, commoning is compatible with the poststructuralist feminist understanding of gender as process – gendering or doing gender – (Butler 1988) which was introduced to feminist political ecology scholars (Nightingale 2006). Yet, feminist political ecology does not solely focus on gender. A feminist political ecology's analytical entry point is, at bare minimum, an intersection of gender and a more-than-human lifeworld. Its fundamental ontological assumption is that gender and more-than-human lifeworlds co-constitute each other. Depending on a specific situated context, other social and ecological differences (e.g., age, social status within the households, landholding size, regional climate, to name a few) also join the mix to shape commoning. Just as seeing both gender and commons as process, feminist political ecology's intersectionality is understood as process, as such, not static, ever-shifting and socio-ecological context-dependent (Kimanthi et al. 2022). That is why intersectionality should be understood as an analytical achievement. It is an analytic through which we may articulate how shifting relations or assemblages shape commoning spatially (across space) and/or temporarily (across time).

A combined community economies and feminist political ecology approach differs from other feminist approaches that examine the human-environment nexus in its recognition of commons not as collective ownership of means of production (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016; Sato and Soto-Alarcón 2019). It rejects the widely spread assumption that collective ownership is as foundational to commons as private ownership is to capitalism. This rejection comes from community economies' rejection of capitalist-centred or capitalocentric thinking (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006). The community economies approach advocates reading economy for difference. It stems from anti-essentialist Marxist thought that sees class as processes of surplus production, appropriation and distribution and recognises diverse class processes (e.g., communal, independent, capitalist, slavery and feudal) intersecting with non-class processes (e.g., gendering, aging, depopulation and climate change) (Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006; Gibson-Graham, Resnick and Wolff 2000; Resnick and Wolff 1987). It recognises the economic landscape as not entirely capitalist or not dominated by capitalism. It, without romanticising, values and makes visible non-capitalism and, in effect, contributions made by those women, minoritized people and other species who perform more-

than-capitalist forms of economies (Miller 2020). It resists capitalocentric thinking by diversifying the category of economy, making visible diverse forms of labour, transactions, enterprises, finance and property (Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006; Gibson-Graham and Dombroski 2020; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013). Capitalist forms of labour, transactions, enterprises, finance and property become one among many. Diverse economic practices, processes and institutions are seen as being propelled in a myriad of directions to form dynamic economies. This approach sees commoning as possible with privately owned property and with capitalist enterprises (Sato et al., 2025). As such, this approach is postcapitalist. Taking an anti-capitalocentric perspective, it does not see collective ownership as the foundation for a commons. The "post" of postcapitalism within community economies does not indicate "after" capitalism in a temporal sense. It indicates a fundamental refusal to place capitalism at the centre of analysis, as that diminishes the visibility of the diversity of other social and economic processes through which we, our livelihoods and the more-than-human networks of which we are a part are continuously reproduced.

A postcapitalist approach has implications for how we conceptualise commoning by freeing us from fixating on the collectivisation of ownership. Seeing more-than-capitalist economic processes allows us to recognise both desirable and undesirable directions of commoning. In these ever-transforming processes, commoning from a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective is an analytical tool to conceive of and enact transformations towards less exploitative, more class, socially and environmentally just outcomes, and these outcomes are independent from the condition of the commons (e.g., degrading or exploitative) around which they occur. In these processes, a practice, a knowledge or a property that facilitates exploitation or unjust practices can be removed (uncommoned) while a practice, a knowledge or a property that facilitates less exploitation and is considered more just in a situated context can be integrated (commoned).

Thinking about the potential of commoning as an analytic in the context of socio-ecological crises, I combine this understanding of commoning with negative commons and care. Negative commons, as already mentioned, is an unwelcome practice, a knowledge or a property that a population is forced to share. Mies and Benholdt-Thomsen (2001) well illustrate a negative commons with their study of the rural German example of organic waste management, which was transformed from communally managed practice, knowledge and property to an unwanted property when responsibility for waste management was transferred to wage labour organised by the local state. In this example it becomes clear that there is no community without a commons. The multispecies community produced through the collective management of organic waste ceased once the collective practice was stopped. In this case, a negative commons was produced by commodification which, ultimately, put an end to commoning. Something that was collectively managed, a commons, was removed and its community quickly disappeared. In this example, a negative commons means the disappearance of a commons and its co-constitutive community. By way of another example, at a different scale and intensity, Kohso (2012, 2020) identified radiation that was released from the 2011 Fukushima disaster as a negative commons, in reaction to which a diverse population, humans and more-than-humans, exposed to extreme vulnerabilities were forced to come together to manage an unwelcome practice, knowledge and property for their co-

survival. The radiation damaged existing socio-ecological ties and facilitated some uncommoning of those ties while it, at the same time, also forged opportunities for a previously desperate population to engage in commoning as collectively caring – maintaining, continuing and repairing – their lifeworlds. To be sure, not all commoning is caring from a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective. For example, commoning can be done to extract natural resources by a collective of actors. From a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective, commoning that produces negative effects on the collective survival of the lifeworlds and/or marginalised livelihoods and well-beings would not be considered caring.

Another way that postcapitalist community economies and feminist political ecology are complementary is that the former widens domains of commons, due perhaps to not coming squarely in the scholarly field that focuses on the human-environment nexus. Feminist political ecology, like other feminist strands that examine the human-environment nexus, has historically focused on examining biophysical commons (or common pool resources). The postcapitalist community economies approach (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016) identifies more-than-biophysical commons, such as cultural commons (e.g., language, food culture), knowledge commons (e.g., knowledge about local biodiversity) and social commons (e.g., a cooperative, a feminist association). Diversifying the domains of commons allows us to see the complexity of the socio-ecological ties that constitute commons across domains beyond the biophysical. Commons that are produced by the effects of neoliberal structural adjustment policies, aging and depopulation are best seen as negative commons. This insight leads us to recognise negative commons in the context of socio-ecological crises. This realisation is productive, particularly for those who study the human-environmental nexus in the hopes of identifying a wider range of strategies to support the formation of community that is commoning.

Postcapitalist feminist political ecology sees commons as necessarily implying commoning and commoning as the production of community. Commons, conceptualised as common pool resources, does not challenge either the 'us' (we humans as actors) vs 'them' (commons as objects to be acted on, resources) binary or the hierarchy that places some humans over other humans and all humans over nonhuman species that is typical in thinking about commons. Building on this insight, a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective has us see commoning negative commons as multispecies collective care efforts to maintain, continue and repair a damaged lifeworld. It, at minimum, has us recognise a more-than-human lifeworld not as objects but as ecological agents (Miller 2020) who would be potential commoners in co-survival.

III. EXPLORING WHAT COMMONING CAN OFFER

I have identified six sets of analytical challenges that I often encounter in feminist work that examines intersections among patriarchy, capitalism and/or environmental degradation. The first set of analytical problematics stems from human-centred perspectives and is made visible by feminist political ecology: the assumption that 1) gender and intersectionality are independent from the environment. The second set of problematics are found in 2) capitalist-centred or class blind perspectives which are made visible when seen through the perspective of community economies: the assumptions that the economy

is singular, that only capitalism is recognised or assumed when class is recognised. Examining these same capitalist-centred perspectives through the combined perspectives of postcapitalist feminist political ecology it becomes possible to see that they take 3) community as pre-existing; that they recognise 4) all care as human care and as social reproduction and agency as human agency; that 5) commoning occurs only in limited domains; and that 6) all transformation is positive. Below I explore how the inclusion of a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective on commoning addresses these analytical challenges.

The case which supports exploration of these problematics is that of *Kunma Suisha-no-Sato* (the water-wheel village of *Kunma*) (hereafter *Suisha*), a long-standing women-led food-based local business that responds to a situated negative commons (Nakamura and Sato, 2023; Sato et al. 2025). The negative commons confronting this community was triggered by neoliberal structural reforms imposed by the government that facilitated the merger of municipalities and the loss of social safety nets, destabilising long-standing socio-ecological ties, which produced biodiversity loss, landscape changes (Morimoto 2011; Takeuchi 2010; Takeuchi et al. 2003) and care deficits (Sato et al. 2025). For nearly three decades over twenty women have aimed to meet collective socio-ecological needs: community revitalization and well-being, in particular, elderly care through their engagement with land, natural resources, diverse actors and materialities.

Gender and Intersectionality

When gender is used to analyse humans, political economy and environment, gender is still often analysed in hierarchical binary or fixed ways, such as homogenous men vs homogenous women, having fixed identity (e.g., women as caring). This essentialization ignores diversity within the categories used and the changes that have happened over history. Insofar as the challenges we face are attributable to these essentialisations, they are unlikely to provide paths to their solution. This insight is well captured in the words of Audre Lorde, a US second-wave black, lesbian feminist, mother and poet, who famously stated, "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984, 110). These 'master's tools' are found in the naturalisation of the centrality of the master, of the use of essentialisms, of the prevalence of binaries, of stereotyping and of romanticising. In this case these manifest as gender essentialism, heteronormativity, white supremacy, capitalocentrism, Orientalism, Eurocentrism and anthropocentrism (human-centred thinking). If we conceive of women as oppressed (leaving men out), and once they become entrepreneurs conceive of them as essentially empowered and instrumental for rural revitalisation, a scenario we often see in the state and large agency narratives, we will be unable to see complex dynamics, such as time poverty, physical and emotional toils and the uneven partiality of their ability to meet their needs that are involved in women's struggles in commoning particularly negative commons. Analysing commoning requires us to pay attention to how commoning, as a set of processes, changes, for example, across time and/or between contexts, in relation to situated dynamics. This same centring of process extends to the understanding of socially given roles such as gender for which Judith Butler's argument that it should not be seen as a frozen role but as an evolving set of processes (Nightingale 2006) that are constantly performed and part of commoning.

Recognition of commoning as process makes it logical to extend the same lens to gendering. However, lessons learned from second wave

feminists' inability to recognise and appreciate differences between women, which contributed to the dissolution of the movement, have led feminists to consolidate around a relational understanding of gender, seeing gender as intertwined with other differences. The notion of intersectionality, coined by the US black feminist legal scholar Kimberlie Crenshaw (1989), has emerged as one of the foundational analytics used to challenge both essentialism and binary notions of gender within feminist studies. Crenshaw examined how a black woman was discriminated against both for her gender and race, shedding light on intersecting axes of oppressions which challenged the then normal understanding of women as essentially similar. While this more structuralist understanding of intersectionality is productive in some contexts, such as the legal profession that Crenshaw examined, commoning as an analytic requires intersectionality to be understood not as combinations of identities but of intersections of dynamic processes which then support recognition of the evolving heterogeneities that are gender and other differences.

Feminist political ecology has never analysed gender in isolation. By definition, in analysis its gender always intersects with, at bare minimum, environmental elements and the specifics of a socio-ecological setting. That is, its intersectionality is always more-than-human. Feminist political ecology has always involved differences other than the social. Intersectionality in this approach is understood as an assemblage (Purr 2012; Kimanthi et al. 2022) that articulates shifting intersections of gender and other differences, including social and more-than-human elements, across scales, spaces and places, that takes into account the emotions that emerge in the process. For example, feminist political ecology would attend to *Suisha* women's embodied collective femininity as intersected with their everyday *soba* (buckwheat) commoning practices, rurality, their social status within the households, their aging corporeality, male community authority, private landowners and urban tourists, as well as more-than-human ecological agents, such as *soba*, terraced agricultural fields, fireflies, climatic events and COVID-19. Women, through this lens, are seen to be pushed by state policy, to have strategically negotiated access to and use of the privately owned unused rice fields for their cultivation of *soba* and to have leveraged the authority of the male community members they knew. Even after they stopped their cultivation of *soba*, these women continued their responsibility for caring for *soba* in their commons in other more manageable ways: by offering new activities, such as *soba* farming and cooking workshops for tourists offered by semi-retired members and by continuously sharing its benefits with old and new commoning community members. Former non-business farm women performed a new collective femininity by negotiating access, use, benefits, care and responsibility for their *soba* commons through shifting configurations of human and more-than-human agents. Their femininities changed from those of farm wives and mothers to businesswomen and active change agents, who expressed joy when contributing to community revitalisation, albeit imperfectly, and who lamented when they could not. This lens makes it possible to see how emotions figure in women's agency and by extension their commoning. Seeing more-than-human intersectionality as process, taking into account emotion, has us see intersectionality as a shifting assemblage, not as a given, but as an analytical achievement.

Economy

Where a combined perspective of commoning

and feminist political ecology offers new insights into gender and intersectionality, the combination of commoning and community economies enables us to see economy beyond that framed through capitalocentric thinking (Gibson-Graham 1996) and class blindness (Wolff 2003). When commons and commoning are concerned, feminist scholars such as ecofeminists Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies and autonomist Marxist feminists Silvia Federici and Mariarosa Della Costa had tendencies to discuss commons and commoning in binary opposition to commodification and private property ownership. For them, when something, for example, seeds (common property) or organic waste management practice (Mies and Benholdt-Thomsen 2001), is commodified, that commodified thing is considered uncommoned (or decommonised). What underlies this conceptualisation is recognition of commodified and privately owned practice, knowledge or property as necessarily not part of a commons. This commodification, as Mies pointed out, is "the main pillar of capitalism" (2014, i112). Private or state capitalism facilitates uncommoning. Capitalists and states, the latter particularly for autonomists, are rarely considered as candidates for membership as commoners. One foundational approach embedded in the community economies approach is reading economy for difference. To open up ontological space for less exploitative, more just economies to emerge and flourish, Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006) proposes that we move away from centring capitalism in our social analyses. One strategy is to see economy in its diversity, diverse forms of labour, transactions, properties, enterprises and finances as already existing (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013).

Looking at the case of *Suisha* from a postcapitalist community economies perspective, we see diverse types of labour, transaction, property, enterprise and finance constituting their commoning (Table 2). *Suisha* is a capitalist but socially and environmentally responsible enterprise, where surplus is appropriated by the board that consists of some *Suisha* women worker representatives and non-*Suisha* members, such as community revitalisation committee members. *Suisha* is recognised as an alternative capitalist

Table 2 Diverse Economy Diagram

LABOUR	TRANSACTION	PROPERTY	ENTERPRISE	FINANCE
Wage	**Market**	**Private**	**Capitalist**	**Mainstream market**
ALTERNATIVE PAID Self-employed Reciprocal labour In kind Work for welfare	**ALTERNATIVE MARKET** Fair trade Alternative currencies Underground market Barter	**ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE** State-managed assets Customary (clan) lands Community land trust Indigenous knowledge (intellectual property)	**ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST** State-owned Environmentally responsible Socially responsible Non-profit	**ALTERNATIVE MARKET** Cooperative bank Credit Union Community-based financial institution Microfinance
UNPAID Housework Volunteer Self provisioning Slave labour	**NON-MARKET** Household sharing Gift giving Hunting, fishing, gathering Theft, piracy, poaching	**OPEN ACCESS** Atmosphere International waters Open-source IP Outer space	**NON-CAPITALIST** Worker cooperative Sole proprietorship Community enterprise Feudal Slave	**NON-MARKET** Sweat equity Family lending Donation Interest-free loan

Adapted from Gibson-Graham et al. (2013, 15)

enterprise because of how it distributes part of the surplus for non-profit activities, such as elderly care and landscape restoration. *Suisha* women are paid a wage. Those members, who are not on the board, give consent to the board to distribute the surplus for social – revitalisation – purposes. They sell commodities, such as food commodities as well as packaged guided tours in the formal market while they donate elderly care and local restoration as gifts to the community. *Suisha* owns facilities and equipment, but not the land, which was loaned by the community authority and the agricultural fields to which they gained interest-free access from private landowners in accordance with state policy regarding unused land. Adding one final complexity to further trouble easy classification, *Suisha's* finances are partly supported by donations from the community authority and the state.

When we pay attention to specificities of diverse economic practices without presuming that an enterprise recognisable as capitalist is necessarily exploitative, that private property may not be part of commons and that capitalists or state institutions may not be part of the commoners, we are able to see a greater diversity of practices as constitutive of commoning. A capitalist enterprise and local governments can be part of commoning. Male communal authorities can play a crucial role for women to start their business. This case study cautions us not to romanticise commoning: it stops us from seeing commoning only done outside of or in opposition to states and capitalist enterprises. This perspective makes visible and keeps possibilities open for us to imagine how women negotiate access, use, benefit, care and responsibilities with male communal authorities, capitalist enterprises and the state as potential commoners to make commoning negative commons, a collective project, which would simultaneously transform gender, economy and environment.

Community

Even after a few decades of concerted criticisms of essentialist understandings of community, such as homogeneity, romanticism and the presumption of its existence in different disciplines, community is still a contested concept. Recognising "no community without commons" and "no commons without community", community understood from a combined postcapitalist community economies and feminist political ecology perspective cautions us not to presume its existence prior to analysis. Instead, it has us identify a specific commons, a practice, a knowledge or a property collectively managed, and attend to how a community is produced through its collective management. The sort of community *Suisha* takes part in is not about a group of people having some characteristic or interest in common or living in the same geographical area. Even if it does not set itself up to directly challenge capitalism or patriarchy, it continuously engages in diverse commoning practices, ranging from negotiating access and use of resources, being gifted some training, distributing surplus to not-for-profit elderly care, to involving tourists in landscape and biodiversity restoration. These everyday incessant commoning practices produce community. Without these commoning practices, their community ceases to exist. This understanding has us see the co-constitution of commons and community. It makes it difficult, if not impossible, to see a community pre-existing without commons and commoning.

Commoning as an analytical tool has us focus on relationships instead of humans and nonhumans in isolation. It helps us become conscious of the interdependent nature of those relationships. From a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective, this community

involves more-than-human lifeworlds. More-than-human intersectionality in combination with commoning as an analytic illuminates interdependent socio-ecological ties between humans and more-than-human lifeworlds. *Suisha,* in its situated in rural context, relies on surrounding more-than-human lifeworlds, such as land, plants, animals, landscape and regional atmosphere for its commodity productions. Both humans and more-than-human lifeworlds comprise the commoning communities of *Suisha*. *Soba*, the raw material for its signature commodity, was collectively managed with microbes in the soil, regional atmosphere, private landlords, communal authority, household members, and consumers, supported by the different governmental and NGO gifts, among others. While human actors, in particular *Suisha* members, consciously engage in commoning, more-than-human lifeworlds might be better understood as taking part in what anthropologist Anna Tsing in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) identified as latent commons, that is 'entanglements that might be mobilised in common cause' (p. 135). More-than-humans species activities tend to be unevenly (in)visible in the eyes of human actors, yet they are an essential part of the *Suisha* commoning communities to continue, maintain and repair their commons. Their oft-invisible species activities are difficult to institutionalise and domesticate, yet they nest within and bind the more visible commoning practices that humans engage in. This insight encourages us to imagine invisibilised socio-ecological ties that constitute a multispecies commoning community. Commoning negative commons, such as the one facing *Suisha*, requires multispecies efforts. Humans alone are not enough. Once feminists can imagine and recognise more-than-human contributions, it helps us see more-than-human lifeworlds as commoners instead of invisible objects to exploit in a latent commons.

Care and Agency

As mentioned earlier, within Western feminist scholarship commoning was coupled with care even before commoning gained currency in the last decade. Autonomist Marxist feminists, such as Silvia Federici (2012), among others, called for commoning social reproduction, which includes housework and care work, during the 1970s Wages for Housework campaign. What commoning, conceptualised through a combination of postcapitalist community economies and feminist political ecology, offers is that it illuminates how commoning care is actually done by making elder care more widely accessed and used, while making its benefits, its care and responsibility for it more widely shared with diverse human actors. It is particularly politically productive to make visible the agency of rural older women, who are often marginalised or, in some cases, highly celebrated as change agents in both popular and academic discourses (Iwashima 2020). In the contexts of the negative commons created by neoliberal restructuring, older women, together with diverse actors, in these cases collectively respond to negative commons by setting up a not-for-profit alternative capitalist social enterprise through which they appropriate surplus for collective needs that go beyond their own. This approach makes visible how older women exercise agency through the articulation of and then working towards meeting collective needs in collaboration with diverse actors. It enables us to see rural femininity not as static but as dynamic, transforming from farm wives and mothers to businesswomen to active change agents with bodies that deteriorate over time while partially reproducing their femininity as carers, and as altruistic.

Care is still often seen as a human activity,

particularly in those studies that do not examine the human-environmental nexus. In those studies, those who give care and those who receive care are both humans. Effects of the negative commons created by neoliberal restructuring produce care deficits concerning not only human care but also socio-ecological care in aging and depopulating rural contexts. Stewards, who used to care for forests, landscapes, agricultural fields and, by extension, habitats for animals, insects and other species, largely men in the case study area, out-migrated or left farming in search of alternative livelihoods or were no longer physically able to work due to aging. *Suisha* women learned to perform care for their negative commons by collectively negotiating for the use of abandoned privately owned rice fields, deciding to replant *soba*, and consciously restoring firefly habitats, *Satoyama* landscape and biodiversity to extend the benefits to non-locals via eco-tourism beyond their immediate community. What women care – maintain, repair and continue – for is the lifeworlds that sustain their livelihoods and well-being. In these commoning practices, human commoners are not only caregivers but also care receivers, and so are more-than-human species. Their livelihoods and their well-being are dependent on those of more-than-humans. Combining commoning and more-than-human care forces us to look at how and with whom human and more-than-human species care for their lifeworlds within their respective species' capacities and temporalities in shifting assemblages in specific socio-ecological settings. These insights have us see varying expressions of women's, other humans' and more-than-humans' agencies that are often rendered invisible. Feminist scholars have persistently argued for shedding light on the forms of context-specific agency enacted by minoritized women (Mohanty 2003). This understanding enables us to extend this call so that we may see the agency of those species that are often invisible in the production of community (Miller 2020).

Diverse domains

When we think of a community, what it signifies for some might not be its biophysical elements. But, when commons are analysed, particularly in the studies that examine the human-environment nexus, including feminist political ecology, biophysical elements are most often identified as commons. A postcapitalist community economies approach sees beyond a biophysical domain to at least three other domains that may support commoning: knowledge, culture and social domains (Gibson-Graham et al. 2016). For *Suisha*, the production of community is done via commoning *soba* by women gaining access to the private no-longer-used rice fields with state support and local men's support, making rules about how to use the fields, making benefits more widely shared, for example, with urban tourists, taking care of the process by actively seeking support from public officers, male family members and community authorities while some members assume more responsibilities than others. This biophysical commoning is supported by commoning knowledge about farming (*soba* and other new crops, such as blueberries), food culture (e.g., recipes for *soba* noodles and cooking workshops with urban consumers) and social reproduction, such as elderly care that involves providing lunch service and monthly social gatherings.

Thinking of commoning in multiple domains and the co-constitution of commons and community helps us reconfigure feminist analytical tools to see commons and a community in multidimensional ways, and it encourages us to look for commons in diverse domains and to find

negative commons in contexts of socio-ecological crises. This realisation is productive, particularly for those who study the human-environmental nexus, as it helps us to see complex ways in which a community is produced (e.g., what is managed, how, with whom and where) and how it is gendered, and this ability to see community provides a foundation from which it is possible to see a wider range of concrete, of locally relevant, strategies that may strengthen community.

Turning now to implications, the sensitivity to diversity that is woven into this strategy encourages sensitivity to the possibility of yet more dimensions. For example, even though the corporeal dimensions, such as tastes and emotions, are not theoretically taken into account in the analysis of four domains, feminist scholars, including those of feminist food studies (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008) and feminist political ecology (Nightingale 2011) have examined the effects of tastes and emotions on the food production and consumption and the collective management of commons respectively. Their studies show the importance of investigating corporeal dimensions that disrupt our attempts to enrol rational minds in the management of, for example, food consumption or biophysical commons. They indicate this productivity in exploring the corporeal and investigating other domains so that we may make visible complex ties that shape commoning but which are not detected in current studies.

Directions for transformations

As a poststructuralist Marxist and feminist who is trained to see processes in contradiction, I am uneasy when commons are conceptualised as something positive and commoning as necessarily moving in positive directions. A postcapitalist community economies perspective that advocates reading economy for difference makes it possible to see commons within capitalist or other exploitative and hierarchical structures. For example, within a capitalist class structure, the board of directors, when it exists, collectively manages the appropriation and distribution of the surplus (a commons). This commoning is exploitative from a Marxist perspective (Resnick and Wolff 1988). Yet, this sort of analysis is often too quick to make judgments about such capitalist commoning. Commoning is a practice of creating access, use, benefit, care and responsibility that are more widely shared. One way to see commoning engaged by an enterprise, capitalist or otherwise, is to track how the surplus is distributed. For example, when the extractivist mining capitalist enterprise, pushed by local civil society pressure, distributed its surplus to the residents where its operation was located, Gibson-Graham and Ruccio (2001) identified this choice to distribute surplus locally as class transformation. Seeing this from a commoning perspective, this new practice of distribution of surplus is now integral to the new socio-ecological ties created by that decision between the capitalist enterprise, the residents and the local environment.

Suisha is a capitalist enterprise where non-direct producers of surplus participate in the appropriation of surplus. It is, therefore, exploitative when seen from a Marxist perspective. However, it is commoning as well as class transformation when the board of directors of *Suisha* responds to the needs of local residents and distributes a portion of the surplus to a communal cause, such as elderly care or landscape restoration. Although the surplus is appropriated by a combination of direct and non-direct labourers, the surplus is partly distributed in a manner that responds to the needs of those whose labour created the surplus. Class, understood as processes

of production, appropriation and distribution of surplus, changed when *Suisha* changed its distribution, thus, a class transformation occurred. *Suisha* attempted to maintain this practice of distributing their surplus for jointly recognised good even when their profit dropped during COVID times and with declining physical capacity due to members' aging. While it is easy to dismiss the enterprise's practice as greenwashing or cause branding (Murray 2013), the perspective requires us to pay critical attention to how distributed surplus is used, and we must pay attention to the other practices of this capitalist enterprise. Yet, a postcapitalist perspective has us see the changing distribution of surplus for a common cause as class transformation that can facilitate commoning for a common cause. The simply defined class structure of an enterprise or initiative is not adequate to determine what counts as commons and commoning. When we take an anti-capitalocentric perspective, which commoning as an analytic helps us see, capitalist enterprises can engage in commoning, and they can also be commoners.

Commoning enables us to see (dis) continuous, non-linear and oft-contradictory transformations over the course of collectively managing (negative) commons: how a certain practice, knowledge or property is uncommoned, re-commoned or newly commoned with diverse actors over historical time and in different socio-ecological settings. *Suisha* women commoned abandoned rice fields together with private landowners, state officers, male family members, and more-than-human species via *soba* farming. However, the physical and emotional damage caused by typhoons forced them to stop self-cultivating *soba* and let go of some parts of *soba* commoning (e.g., the relationship with private landowners). While struggling to cope with their aging bodies they re-commoned and engaged in new commoning via the development of *soba* farming and cooking workshops with semi-retired *Suisha* members and new people, including urban consumers. Commoning from a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective helps us make visible shifting diverse assemblages of humans and more-than-human actors, elements and practices in the course of surviving well together in place.

Commoning as an analytic, which enables us to see transformations of a community, is productive only when accompanied with feminist and other allied politics. Without feminist politics, we will not be able to identify which direction commoning should go or assess a commoning practice as desired or undesired in the contexts of socio-ecological crises. It requires that we cultivate feminist, Marxist, and environmentalist political interests that provide the normative grounds required to recognise the need for and then to emancipate ourselves from gender, class, environmental and other injustices. *Suisha* women earned support by working strategically with male community members, which brought them access to and use of private and communal property and financial resources. However, commons are not shared by all. Some species, such as birds, deer and boar that damage their agricultural inputs, for example, are unwelcome in a specific space (e.g., agricultural field) and temporality (e.g., before harvest). It is the normative ends we endorse that inform decisions about whether what we observe is a desired or undesired in our commoning. The application of commoning within postcapitalist feminist political ecology is never politically neutral. It, without romanticizing commoning, allows us to see more desirable directions by making ties with certain things, actors and places and disassociating ourselves from certain things, actors and places depending on the situated

politics. In these ever-transforming processes, commoning framed within the politics that is informed by postcapitalist feminist political ecology together with diverse situated stakeholders becomes a productive analytical tool to help us strategise transformations towards less exploitative, more class, socially and environmentally just directions fitted to their situated contexts.

IV. CONCLUSION

Today, we observe the spread of fascism and of climate change. Together they are likely to accelerate socio-ecological crises that disproportionately harm the already vulnerable. Corresponding to this, negative commons that disrupt existing necessary socio-ecological ties, are expected to increase. Feminist scholars in Japan must develop politics and analytical strategies relevant to these times of intersecting social and ecological crises for our survival together with the diversity of lifeworlds on which we are interdependent. Instead of relying on ecomodernist approaches that rely on technology which, at the core, ignore and perpetuate the social, economic and environmental injustices that contributed to our current dire straits, I have found it more productive to use commoning to learn about the context-specific strategies humans and more-than-human lifeworlds create in working together to deal with negative commons in our situated contexts. In this essay I explored how commoning from a postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspective as an analytical tool helps feminist researchers reconfigure familiar feminist analytical tools, such as gender, intersectionality, economy, community, care and agency as well as commoning specific tools, different domains and its direction for transformation, drawing mainly on the case study in Japan that responded to negative commons.

Commoning from postcapitalist feminist political ecology perspectives illuminates how a community is maintaining, continuing and attempting to repair even negative commons together with diverse actors including those of lifeworlds in place. Together with intersectionality, this analytic helps us to study complex and contradictory more-than-capitalist and more-than-human constantly shifting processes through which communities attempt survival. As a feminist analytical tool, it has us pay attention to gender, class and other social dynamics as they are transformed. The poststructuralist epistemology and ontology found in the approach goes along with commoning as process to encourage us continuously to work against binary thinking. It helps us relax our fixations on patriarchy, capitalism and humans in which binaries, such as men over women, capitalism over noncapitalism, and humans over nonhumans thrive. This release enables us to pay attention to diverse femininities and masculinities, diverse economies and our nesting relationships with more-than-human lifeworlds. It opens up our imaginaries to rethink how diverse actors, including men, capitalist enterprises and more-than-human earth others, as (potential) commoners in the efforts to collectively survive well together. This helps us think about how to potentially move away from exploitative socio-ecological relationships. We can strategically think of which relationships to let go of or avoid and with whom to continue or forge a community. With these tools, we are better able to imagine nonhuman species as allies or kins (Haraway 2016).

Commoning as an analytic may help us reconfigure familiar feminist tools. They facilitate explorations of new paths towards transitions from

exploitative, patriarchal and human-centred to less exploitative and more equal socio-ecologically just relations in times of socio-ecological crises. However, commoning is not a magic analytic. Our feminist theoretical explorations require us to be reflexive and commoning requires norms. In the process of producing a community together, the voices and needs of minoritized people and species should not get left out since commoning (community making) can be done in ways that reinforce hierarchy and exclusion. Commoning may force some humans and species to do others harm. Feminist politics should support those forms of commoning that produce a more equal, less exploitative, less hierarchical and more convivial relationship among commoners. Our analyses should point out negative effects and contradictions in commoning in order not to romanticise postcapitalist multispecies commoning and agency.

Privileges blind us from seeing the negative commons experienced by the less privileged including more-than-human lifeworlds. In addition to the quickly spreading fascism and climate change, Kohso (2012, 2020) also reminds us of radiation as slow violence, pointing out how it affects much larger lifeworlds outside of the immediate one through, for example, air and ocean water diffusions and food consumption, in a similar way to the plastic as slow violence discussed by Liboiron (2021). Conservative politics, aging, depopulation, climate change, radiation, and plastic are part of our everyday life. Dealing with negative commons requires a community that collectively manages negative commons. Even though commoning is one among many valuable analytics, I suggest exploring its analytic and political productivity by using it to examine how we and those we study are embedded in and constituted through communities. I hope the exercise has us taste the (potential) productivity of the analytics and will motivate us to actively engage in respective community building to make concrete transformations in our times of socio-ecological crises.

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