



X-RAYING SALIENT ISSUES IN FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN NIGERIA: A PARADIGM SHIFT

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Abstract

Women have been discovered to be the most unprivileged lot. Their male counterparts are considered superior and at the slightest opportunity lord it over them even with reckless abandon. It is equally discovered that culturally women are second class citizens while men are taken as lords who should be respected at all times. On

the other hand, culture plays key role because factors responsible for submerging the women folk seem to be embedded in various

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culture and are therefore considered as untouchable. The above statement form the gamut of this study.

INTRODUCTION

Sexism or gender has long been recognized as important within environmental issues, but exactly how it is relevant and in what contexts have been hotly debated. Some feminists have argued that there is a natural or essential connection between women and nature which gives women an intimate understanding of ecosystems and environment protection (Diamond and Orenstain, 2000; Shiva, 2008). This kind of essential thinking has been challenged by other feminist who instead focus on the material practices that bring women closer to nature and which thus give them knowledge of ecosystems (Agarmaw,

2002; Warren, 2007). Within geography, many political iconologists have embraced a historical- materialist argument and focus on gender as one relation through which access, ownership exploitation and distribution of natural resources is differentiated within societies, (Carney, 2004; Fortmann, 2006; Freidberg; 2001; Gururani, 2002; Mackenzie, 2005, Rocheleau et al, 2006; Schroeder and Suryanata, 2006). In this work, gender is closely linked to biological sex understood as culturally defined male female roles. Such studies have documented how women are denied access to new technologies, training, and other benefits of development projects, and given limited access to and control over land and natural resources (Barker,2000: Carney, 2006; Decre and de leal, 200L; Moser 2003; Nathen 2005). What remains generally unaddressed, however, is how such inequality is maintained over time and space, particularly in societies in which women shoulder the bulk of agricultural production of goods and services even in this 21st century we are.

The production of social inequalities and environments by examining and when gender and other forms of difference become enrolled in environmental issues. I draw on definitions of gender that imagine it as a process by which subjectivities are produced and shift over time and space (Butler, 1990; 1997; Connell, 2007; Mahoney and Yngvesson, 2002; Mehta an ondi, 2009), rather than as part of power-laden systems of social structures. The meaning and relevance of gender are thus produced in space and in part constitute that space such that neither can pre-exist the other (Bondi and Davidson; 2004; Massey, 2004; McDowell, 2009; part and Hanson, 1994). If the gender is unable to pre-exist its context then the focus of gender environment studies needs to shift to how gender becomes relevant in environmental disputes and how gendered subjectivities are reproduced in environments (Bondi and Davidson, 2004).

This conceptualization emphasizes that gender is not constant and predetermined materially or symbolically but rather becomes salient in environment issues through work, discourses of gender, and the performance of subjectivities. Not only are inequalities between men and women a consequence of environmental issues, gender is a cause of environmental change in the sense that gender is inextricably linked to how environments are produced. When gender is conceptualized as a

process, the complex interplay between gender, environment and other relevant aspects of social and cultural processes can be analyzed. In the second part of the paper I draw on a case study of community Forestry in Nepal to illustrate these dynamics in a place based development project. Before turning to the case study, I review the literature on gender and environment and suggest that if these post-structural insights are used to re-conceptualize gender, then the environment nexus also needs to be retheorised.

Fundamental Human Right.

In the words of Okonkwo {2020}, fundamental human right is taken for those human rights that are natural, inalienable, non transferable and can only be enjoyed by the beneficiary.

Essentialist Conceptualization of Gender and Environment

Let it be established that in the mid-1970s feminist scholars began to examine the dualistic association that aligned women with nature and men with culture (Griffin, 2008; Ortner, 2004). These associations were lined to a host of binary structures such as: men are rational and women are emotional, women are nurturing whereas men are competitive (Haraway, 2001; Merchant, 2002; Ortner, 2004). In protection (Diamond and Orenstein, 200; Mies and Shiva, 2003; Shiva 2008). This ecofeminist thinking was premised on the idea that the domination of women was linked to environmental destruction and other problematic social response to this some feminists embraced the idea that women are closer in nature and in the context of the growing environmental movement, argued inherently have a better understanding of the importance of environment inequalities such as racism. Griffin's 2008 book women and nature. The roaring inside her was an important piece of lyrical writing that helped to inspire ecofeminism. In this book Griffin uses poet and evocative writing to equate the violence done to the land with violence done to women. Importantly, she puts forward the idea that women, like nature, could fight back and was doing so using their nature.

This kind of work promoted an essentialist notion of women that was common within feminism at the time 'Women' was a largely undifferentiated category and it was assumed that all women would

have the same kind of sympathies and understanding of environmental change as a consequence of their close connection to nature. Shiva's 2008 book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* is perhaps one of the most famous examples to come out of this kind of thinking. This work discusses the grassroots of Chipko movement in northern India and symbolic resources which women involved drew upon to save forests from commercial loggers. In it she argues that Indian women have an inherent connection to nature, and the power that arises from that connection inspires them to risk their lives in front of logging machinery. Although women are oppressed and marginalized in modern Indian society, Shiva draws ancient religious beliefs and stories to suggest that women are in fact more powerful than men and certainly have a more profound understanding of environmental change. This work was incredibly important in promoting the idea that understand people (especially women) could have a better understanding of environmental protection than scientists and policy makers. It was also expedient in advocating a global women's movement, linked together by threat to women's home environment (Seager, 2003). Shiva asserted that the inherent understanding women have of their environment would help to bridge cultural gaps and provide a focus around which they could join together globally. Although heavily criticized both within India and by other feminist for inaccuracies in her work and for problematic assumption about different women's experiences, Shiva's work has inspired women all over the world to defend environmental resources and was central in making 'Chipko' a household name in many places.

Other key co-feminist focused on the ideological assumptions of modern science that are based upon dominating 'mother nature' (Merchant, 2002; Mies and Shiva 2003; Plumwood, 1991; Warren, 1987). They argue that there are close connections between patriarchy and modern transformation of environments. Thus the reversal of environmental destruction cannot fully occur without the emancipation of women. In this kind of conceptualization, gender, based on biological sex, is the foundation relation that serves to support other problematic relations such as race, class and heterosexism (Plumwood, 2001; Warren 2007).

Materialist conceptions of women environment Conceptualizing the relationship between woman and nature as an essential one has helped to define a global women's environmental movement and challenged the hegemony of (male) scientific knowledge as the privileged source of information about environmental change. However, as other feminists argued, essential conceptualization of women ignored very real differences that exist between women and, worse, rely on the notion of an essential female nature (Cuomo, 2008). Women of color in the United States were some of the first feminists to challenge the white, middle-class bias in feminism (Hooks, 2004; Moraga and Anzalda, 2008). Latino and African, American women argued that in many contexts race was more salient in shaping their experiences of inequality and thus the intersection of race class, and gender need to be theorized (Hooks, 2000; Kobayashi and Peake, 2004; Moraga and Anzaldua, 2008).

Agarwal (1992) challenged Shiva's essentialist rendering of the women and environment nexus, drawing from her own work on women and fuel-wood issues in the Himalayas, she argues that, although a relationship between women and their motivation to protect the environment could indeed be identified, this relationship was based on their material realities and not on some inherent, close connection to nature.

Many Indian women are responsible for the food and fuel of their families, which requires them to tend to land and gather products from forest (Agarwal, 1994, Gururani, 2002). These activities give them intimate knowledge of their ecosystem and a strong need to ensure that resources are sustainable; failure to do so results increased work burdens for themselves (Agarwal, 1994; 1997). She named this brand of theorizing 'ecological feminisms' to distinguish it from the essentialists conceptions of women that were beginning to dominate the ecofeminism literature (Agarwal 1992). Ecological feminism argued for a clear focus on gender, defined as the differences between men and women's experiences and knowledge in relation to their environment. This focus illuminates the importance of material practices, in particular men and women's work practices and culturally specific gender role in shaping the gender environment nexus. It also builds on ideas already put forward by Shiva and others that rural women's environmental

knowledge is valid and important. By basing this claim on material practices, Agarwal helped to give an empirical basis to the idea that women have unique environmental knowledge and, significant producing partly, brought political-economic analysis into the debate around gender and environment. She argued that the material conditions of people's lives are complicit in producing particular kinds of environmental problems, and these problems place extra burdens on women responsible for the subsistence needs of their families. Thus attention on political economy as well as to cultural expectation and behavior around gender is important in analyzing environmental issues.

Women political ecology/Environment.

Building from ecofeminism and ecological feminism the book feminist political ecology edited by Rocheleau et al (1996) laid out what they saw as the three key themes to emerge from feminist theorizing on gender and environmental and recent political- ecology work:

1. Gendered knowledge, or the ways in which access to ecological knowledge is structured by gender.
2. Gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, including differential access by men and women to various legal and facto claims to land and resources.
3. Gendered politics and grassroots activism, including an examination of environmental movements.

The first theme considered sexist knowledge, follows much of the feminist environmentalism literature and explores how men and women have differential knowledge of natural resources. For example, men often have privilege access to agro forestry extension workers, new training opportunities and, other knowledge associated with science (Diamond and Orenstein 1990; Rocheleau et al, 1996b, Wangari et al, 1996), while women have experimental knowledge gained from their role as subsistence providers in household, Rocheleau et al (2000) use this information to demonstrate that women often have crucial knowledge on natural resources that allows for household survival and to argue that women should be included more centrally in developing projects and extension work.

The second theme, gendered rights and responsibilities, explores the contexts within which women are denied equal access to land and resources. In many Third World contexts, agrarian reforms legally distributed land to male heads of household only. Undermining women's de facto claims to use rights and control over land (Bourque and Warren, 1981; Chant and Radcliffe, 1992; Deere, 1990; Gisbert et al, 1994; Radcliffe, 1992). Current development projects often intersect with these conflicts over land and resources to the detriment of women (Carney, 1996; Rocheleau et al 1996b), although such negative effects are acknowledged to be spatially and temporally specific (Agarwal, 1994; Carney, 1996; Schroeder, 1997). The importance of recognizing complex land-rights in terms of private property often creates significant social-justice consequences, particularly for women (Agarwal, 1994; Carney, 1996; Gururani, 2000; Rocheleau and Edmunds, 1997).

The third theme, gendered politics and grassroots movements, examine social movements but includes a specific focus on the role of women within them, highlighting how they have been empowered through involvement in community struggles for control over natural resources. Although certainly not without their contradictions, environmental social movements are seen to have tremendous potential for the emancipation of women and impoverished communities in addition to environmental protections (Escobar, 1995; Peet and Watts, 1996a; for an alternative argument see Reed, 2000).

In summary, most of the work done within feminist political ecology demonstrates how gender understood as culturally defined male and female sex roles, structures access to particular types of knowledge, space, resources, and socio-political processes (compare Carney, 1996, Freidberg, 2001a; 1996b), the focus on these structures provides an important foundation for arguing that men and women have differential opportunities and challenges in relation to environmental change and development. Feminist political ecology provides tools for political ecologists to examine gender and emphasizes the importance of considering gender in the context of a variety of natural-resources issues. The emphasis within feminist political ecology, however, has largely remained on women and, indeed, in places in Rocheleau et al's book (1996a) 'gender' seems synonymous with 'women' and is a danger

in such a conceptualization of falling back into essential understandings of women and their ‘natural’ connection to the land. This kind of essentialism marks a variety of political-economic, cultural, and symbolic processes by which gender is produced by environmental issues as well as being implicated in the construction of the issues itself. In short what is still not sufficiently highlighted is a clear understanding of how gender has come to be relevant in these contexts at all.

Summary

At this stage, it will be necessary to establish that this work outlined or x-rayed salient issues in the fundamental rights of women in Nigeria. The importance of gender/sexism and the production of other subjectivities as central analytical tools for analyzing human environment interactions. The political-ecology literature has emphasized that access to, control over and the distribution of resources are at the core of most environment issues, both in terms of social inequalities and in terms of ecological reductions. Who is responsible for creating, harvesting rules, who actually does the work, and what contestations result are key aspects of environmental issues. Uncovering the processes by which these occur is critical if we hope to challenge the over exploitation of both land and people and most especially the women. The feminist literature on gender and on the performance of other forms of difference provides an analytical entry point for exploring how subjectivities both constitute and are produced by environmental issues. The re-analysis of within natural-resources management reveals the ways that sexism and caste become salient within community forestry and the ways in which men and women of different caste have a different experience of it.

When sexism is conceptualized as a linear or structuring relation, a consideration of gender in environmental issues leads primarily to the promotion of strategies to equalize the impact on men and women. Although such measures can be important, they do not always produce the anticipated outcome because of the dynamic relationship between gender, environment, and many other aspects of social and cultural life. Once gender is re-conceptualized as a process, these relationships can be brought into view and examined within environmental debates. My

fieldwork examples details with way in which material and discourse acts of gender-based resistance take place within environments and in relation to particular ecological conditions, and thus cannot be understood divorced from the environment. Analyzing gender this way demonstrates how ecological conditions are transformed and reproduced both materially and symbolically in contradictory ways through the process contesting social hierarchies. To take this work further it is necessary to ask: what opportunities for positive ecological and social change are produced by understanding the complexities of these processes?

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the researcher recommend as follows:

1. Understanding what make up social relations in human societies means that planners re-evaluate how they make developmental programmes. Instead of having various sexist debates and arguments, basic needs, for environmental programmes, it is necessary to re-uderstand these not as additive processes but as embedded within each other.
2. also, it is crucial to recognize the contingent relationship that intersect at the social-elations environment nexus. It is not possible to develop one formula for the implementation of community forestry that will be sensitive to gender and caste relations in the contexts. In some context, other relations such as political party membership or class may be more salient for defining labor relations and contestations over resources:
3. the critical issues are how subjectivities become significant and are played out within development projects and in relation to environmental change. This analysis points to the need for more attention to how projects are implemented andthe importance of allowing for sufficient flexibility and attention to the shifting relationship between environment development, and difference.

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