



# THE GENDER LENS

ESSAYS BY STUDENTS FROM WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY

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This journal is containing a selection of essays written by students of Wageningen University for the course 'Gender and Natural Resource Management' (WRM- 33806). The journal shows the diversity within gender studies and the importance of the research field.

## FOREWORD

The essays that you are about to read have been written and reviewed by the students of the course "Gender and Natural Resource Management" (WRM 33806) offered at Wageningen University. This course, multidisciplinary in nature, brought together students with a variety of social and educational backgrounds (Social Sciences as well as Natural Sciences). Towards the end of the course it was decided that the essays, individually written by students on topics of their interest, should be made accessible for a larger audience. By then, it had become clear to us that a gender perspective on agriculture related issues needs more attention according to the Sustainable Development Goals which Wageningen University and Research has agreed on. The editing that took place after the essays had been written and handed in, was marginal and aimed to obtain coherence among referencing and language. Here it should be mentioned that content-wise, the students had been reviewing each other's essays during specifically assigned workshops before the deadline.

The essays in this collection, loosely grouped by five themes, reflect the different interests of their writers. In the first theme, Politics of the personal, the essays describe individual viewpoints and insights, as for many, "some-what unexpectedly, learning about gender through this course became a very personal endeavour" (Arifin, p. 14). They share originality and freedom in writing, appreciating the visibility of "someone who is herself part of the world that she writes about" (Dejalle, p. 10). The second theme, Gendered aspects of global trade, consists of essays applying feminist frameworks to transnational processes of trade, "analyz[ing] in depth the social structures linked to the global food system" (Seelman, p. 18). The third theme in this collection, Feminist perspectives and the environment, focuses on the natural environment. Introducing concepts such as ecofeminism, both essays account for the importance of a gendered analysis of environmental activism. The theme Access, empowerment and agency in the Global South contains essays discussing the relation between politics of access to (privatized) natural resources, on the one hand, and gender equality on the other. The first two essays grouped in the final theme, Gender, society and politics, conceptually discuss the representation of women in the political domain. The last two essays are case studies outlining societal influences on gender roles, attempting to understand factors that contribute to women's empowerment.

Although at first sight highly heterogeneous, all these essays include gender and feminism in their analyses. Hence, the gender lens employed by all the writers has allowed for an original and critical outlook on important debates concerning environment and society. As one student put it: "I want to talk about and spread the feminism that challenges structures at their roots." (Borràs Escayola, p. 7). In essence, this is what a feminist analysis aims for, and this is what the majority of the writers in this essay collection have done: to critically rethink the issues and debates in their disciplines with the help of a gender lens.

We would like to thank Dr. Deepa Joshi, who has inspired many of us to push our thinking and to write about what was of interest to us – although this collection of essays was a student initiative, it would not have been established without a conducive, stimulating learning environment. We also express our gratitude to the many guest lecturers that have given the course a truly multidisciplinary character. Thanks also to the students, who together have brought the course to a next level thanks to their engaged inputs.

We wish new generations of WUR students keep up our initiative to make the significance of gender aspects visible by following up this Gender Lens with new editions.

The Gender Lens team

## CONTENTS

### **The personal is political**

- 7. Maria Borràs: The triad for an equitable society: Agroecology, feminism, and solidarity economy.
- 10. Lois DeJalle: Contemporary Mina's regain their madness: An attempt to feminism through self-reflection and resisting ideology
- 14. Sharah Arafin: Gender, identity and culture: An overview of my personal experience

### **Gendered aspects of global trade**

- 18. Louelle Seelman: The Feminist Political Ecological Framework as a tool to analyze structures and related issues throughout the global food system
- 21. Noor van der Voorst: Sweet fruits, bitter realities: Impacts on women's lives in a globalised agricultural system
- 24. Chantal Kronenburg: Challenging traditional gender roles in agro-export: An analysis of the access to trade unions in the banana industry

### **Feminist perspectives and the environment**

- 29. Evelien Konings: (Dis)Connected with nature: Environmental activism from an ecofeminist perspective
- 32. ris Hartog: Why gender matters for nature conservationists

### **Access, empowerment and agency in the Global South**

- 37. Nine de Pater: Microfinance as a tool of empowerment: A broad view on the effect of microfinance programs on women's agency
- 40. Lauren Huisman: Gender and water privatization
- 44. Katinka van Buuren: Gender equality through women's land rights in Nepal

### **Gender, Society and Politics**

- 48. Beatriz Alvarado: Ecology and feminist movements: the path of full representation of women within the political domain
- 51. Silja Heyland: How effective is the 'gender quota'
- 55. Stefan Schüller: The army's influence on women's societal role: exploring the Israeli case
- 58. Vivienne Leidenfrost: Women's rights before and after marriage in the middle east

# THE TRIAD FOR AN EQUITABLE SOCIETY: AGROECOLOGY, FEMINISM, AND SOLIDARITY ECONOMY

Maria Borràs  
Master Organic Agriculture

Greening without justice, without equity, will not sustain the Earth or our future.  
Sturgeon, 2009

## Introduction

We depleted our soils, as we depleted the dignity of humans. We are living in a global crisis: an economic, social, personal and educational one and all of them, in my understanding, derived from the rotting of the structure itself (economy-patriarchy-state hand-in-hand). A systemic crisis, part of a failed development model (gender blind, patriarchal and indifferent to human rights).

Nowadays we are facing the era of Green Capitalism, in which “green ways of living” are embraced by the rich while the poor live in unsafe, violent and toxic environments (Sturgeon, 2009). Ethical consumption is a difficult pair of words in my understanding, but I think we need to be aware of our privilege (being born in the North) and make a good use of it, in this example at why the kind of consumption matters. For me ethical consumption is not FairTrade or EKO, or organic. Most of these products are the result of corporations “going green”, products that are being sold to advance the privilege of elites (Sturgeon, 2009). We need new patterns of production-consumption, new ways of dealing with economy that allows humans to live a life in freedom, regardless of where they were born. To face this crisis we need to come with trans-disciplinary work and mindsets. We can work with other specialists and exchange knowledge, but first of all a shift of our minds needs to occur. It is necessary to start working with system thinking in order to understand that we are not alone and our actions have consequences here and there, all around the planet, because we live in a globalised world. We have the urgency to approach challenges in a positive manner, and, as Bill Mollison (1988) expresses in the Permaculture Principles, be aware that the problem is the solution, in the sense that to envision a new alternative we should focus on what created the actual paradigm. To be sustainable, having a look at the agronomist practices needed is not enough nor to look at the solution as a mere technological explainable problem. We need to go far beyond one fast and simple solution to one problem, because we are not alienated and sterile elements, but a complex social system that interacts with many domains at the same time.

My personal proposal here is the following: there is not one magic solution to one problem, but a set of ideas that might change the whole structure.

My attempt in this piece is to give some hints

on the ideas that I think are most appropriate to go together in order to lead to an unfolding future where people are more important than profit. I will further elaborate on the concepts of agroecology, feminist theory and solidarity economy and the potential linkage between them. Why is a feminist perspective important? Which new economy models can fit in this new approach? How can agroecology help in this transformative process? I will try to answer those questions and make connections between them.

## Feminist perspective: Why is a feminist perspective important?

I will start to elaborate why I think that feminism is important. I believe it is the first change we need to make in our minds to work towards equality. In the critique of the state made by Abdullah Öcalan (president of the PKK, Kurdistan Workers Party) he describes sexism as one of the ideological pillars of the state. He points out how the state and capitalism objectify women, sexually and as labour force (Descontrol, 2015). As Batliwala (2007) explains, the idea that economic power and access to productive resources would weaken traditional gender and social roles and empower poor women to demand further change is becoming a mantra for development: “poor women become a sound economic and political investment” (Batliwala, 2007), using women as objects and not as the subjects that they are. I consider it indispensable to work through feminism and I would like to clarify what I understand about feminism and for which feminism I stand.

I recognize that there are many ways and historical contributions of feminism. I position myself as a feminist, aware that substantive equality in gender relations cannot be fully achieved within the framework of capitalism. I fight for the destruction of all forms of domination and exploitation of this detrimental model. I argue that in the struggle to build a new society beyond capitalism we must address gender inequalities.

When I talk about feminism I don't want to talk (only) about gender roles, I would like to transcend this idea (which, in my perception, continues to be dualistic). Recently I've been reviewing the ideas explored in this paper together with my close friends. Most of them had no problem with agroecology or with a solidarity economy, but when I said the word feminism their eyes became big (as a sign of surprise) and a question was following: why feminism? I realized, or re-realized (because I already experience it before) that feminism is a word that sounds frighten-



ing/surprising to most, maybe just because its most fundamental root is nurturing from challenging the privileged positions and dismantling power (and if you are the person in that position that might affect you).

I want to talk about and spread the feminism that challenges structures at their roots. As Dilar Dirik expressed during her conference in Utrecht, women's liberation has to be our red line. We need to educate a critical society that can question why, only then we will be able to start shifting directions. For this reason, because it focuses on the structure rather than simple solutions to the symptoms of the real problem, I see feminism directly linked with the other two concepts I stand for. Also, in the following pages we will see how it is directly connected and embedded.

### **Agroecology: How can agroecology help in this transformative process?**

The rationale behind agro-export is feeding frenetic consumerism and as a consequence apathy is polluting our lives while destroying livelihoods and landscapes everywhere. Initiatives created as opposed to exploitation and inequality of the dominant economic system ended up as what we know today as green capitalism, presenting itself as a natural outgrowth of capitalism (Sturgeon, 2009). Personally I don't think this is an alternative, but more an opportunistic strategy to continue growing the company's benefits. I see that the only way to a sustainable future is the way towards agroecological practices.

As Siliprandi (2014) points out, there has not been enough dialogue between the areas of feminism and agroecology. Those two concepts have not been integrated enough and we need to work in this direction if we want to achieve real change, because both concepts find each other in their main arguments. Like feminism, agroecology is also creating a new conceptual map in our minds, where the role of agriculture is not only providing food, but restoring ecosystems.

A very important point also for agroecology is that it can be developed everywhere, with a different set of practices, but with the same basis of working with nature, not against it (see also Mollison 1988). For this reason, agroecology follows and fits perfectly within the idea of global-place development (Gibson-Graham 2005), where different alternatives from all around the globe come together to achieve a global change.

Agroecology emerged as an approach to better understand the ecology of traditional farming systems and respond to the mounting problems resulting from an increasingly globalized and industrialized agro-food system (Altieri, 2011). It can be seen as an appreciation of farmer-generated knowledge that challenges conventional approaches to agricultural research and related policy making that privileges Western epistemologies of knowledge production (Méndez, 2013). The place where the knowledge is produced is crucial for the development of strategies that can work in a specific context, and agroecology is providing the blank pages for it.

Agroecology is not only a set of practices or a

science. Agroecology is a movement that shakes in a multidimensional direction. This revolution is social, technological and cognitive (Altieri, 2011). Because the practice of it demands knowledge-intensive application it is fundamental that it is based on the capability of local communities to experiment, evaluate and scale-up innovations through farmer-to-farmer research and grassroot approaches. (Altieri, 2011). The expansion of agroecology in Latin America has initiated an interesting process of cognitive, technological and socio-political innovation, intimately linked to the new political scenarios such as the emergence of progressive governments and resistance movements of campesinos and indigenous people (Altieri, 2011).

Rural social movements embrace the concept of food sovereignty as an alternative to the neo-liberal approach that puts its faith in inequitable international trade to solve the world's food problem (Altieri, 2011). Agroecology provides the principles for rural communities to reach food sovereignty but also energy and technological sovereignty within a context of resilience (Altieri, 2011).

It is said that the agro-export sector makes significant contributions to the (national) economies, but this is not free of cost. It brings with it the black screen: negative impacts on public health, ecosystem integrity, food quality and in many cases it disrupts the livelihoods of farmers in the region. To which economy are those farmers contributing? Most of them went bankrupt or face an enormous debt. The logic of accumulation that feeds the actual global market (called capitalism) is based on the exploitation and the usurpation of surplus. It is an economy that serves the market and not the people. It might be difficult to escape from its hegemonic discourse that presents capitalism as the only present form of economy (Gibson-Graham, 1996), but there are alternatives and we just need to give them the space (land from agroecology) and the voice (of everybody).

### **Solidarity economy: Which new economy models can fit in this new approach?**

Last but not least, a solidarity economy draws its attention to the shift of the economy from market-centred to people-centred. A solidarity economy forms, in combination with the other two, an ideal, yet in my understanding, very possible world. Daily practices of women are both resistance and construction (Sempreviva Organizaçao Feminista, 2015). Resistance from the attacks of capitalism and construction of the world we all want to live in. The economic shift needs to be based on values such as solidarity, reciprocity, justice and equality and a feminist economy is the tool to reach this state (SOF, 2015).

A feminist economy forces us to rethink the concept of work, including also non-paid jobs, those that guarantee life, making us understand the interdependency of the processes that make society run. We need to reconsider the concepts and how we value those ideas. Maybe, and this is a conversation I had also a lot of times with friends of mine, we need to work at the semiotic level and start working with the

language itself, because the way we speak is the way we act and although it seems banal, I consider it as very important.

We need to break with the logic of accumulation that destroys territories and livelihoods, pollutes water and lets biodiversity become extinct. We need to do it as soon as possible, otherwise it might be very difficult to reverse (if still possible).

In the article (Gondim, 2011) about Xique Xique Food Chain (in Brazil), agroecology, feminism and solidary economy work together as the base of the whole chain. Xique Xique Food Chain interlines its organization focusing on scattering the agroecology process along with all the groups that take part in it and the solidary economy has been one of the greatest coefficients for that. Together with agroecological and feminist perspectives they have been all known as a pioneer into local, national and international debates (Gondim, 2011).

### **For further reflection**

As Sturgeon (2009) suggests, we need education in how environmental and social justice are related, to work towards that approach in the future and be able to integrate them in our (un)consciousness.

To conclude this paper I need to add that there are some concepts I would have liked to elaborate on, like democratic confederalism, which has ecology and feminism as main pillars and fits to my idea. Democratic confederalism should act as a base upon we construct this society, maybe without a state, like Rojava is doing right now. And also, very important, the concept of Jineology, described as a science of women that takes as its starting point colonized classes and histories in order to redefine academic research beyond the existing dominant structures of the patriarchal capitalist state (Kaya, 2015). I think that these two ideas are full of potential to be explored and experienced.

My proposition in this essay is in a position of self-defence. And self-defence is not only understood not as defence to some threat, but as the will to construct something better than what we have. This past weekend I attended the conferences at the New World Summit in Utrecht about Democratic Confederalism and Stateless Democracy. Personally I think that we cannot wait anymore that states give us our rights, but we need to go and get them, using the power of the people. The message is clear again, we need to move, and we need to do it now!

As Antonio Gramsci (1992) said the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear. Let's read the symptoms and initiate a new story. Let's prepare a fertile soil, so the "new" can be born.

Salud y Agroecología!

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# CONTEMPORARY MINA'S REGAIN THEIR MADNESS: AN ATTEMPT TO FEMINISM THROUGH SELF-REFLECTION AND RESISTING IDEOLOGY

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Master International Development Studies

## Introduction

In this essay I will discuss how I understand gender and feminism and how I consider its potential and added value in looking at them. I will do this by reflecting on my personal experiences and ideas, while using related concepts that will argue for and explain my point of view while discussing contradictory effects. I will use a specific approach in doing this, namely by talking in first person. I firstly became inspired to do this by writers like Mohanty, who took, as I saw it, a way less formal way of writing. Where it seemed not professional at first, I began to appreciate the fact that it was evident that there was a person behind the text, with own experiences, opinions and ideas. Someone who is herself part of the world that she writes about. Its objectiveness may lack to some, but personally I feel that you take more responsibility for what you write and acknowledge the fact that complete objectivity is never possible. Science is deeply regulated, patterned and disciplined (Zwarteveen, 2016) which is understandable, since there is a need to distinguish it from everyday 'normal' knowledge. However, I feel that science also loses its power and even legitimization. There is a reason why grassroots knowledge is not considered as science, but I wish the two were more intertwined as an alternative to the contemporary system and I think feminism is the right 'tool' to challenge this, which will be an important argument of this essay.

The approach I will use in this essay, in which I will argue for the following: we need alternative ways of thinking and discourses to counter hegemonies of capitalism and neoliberalism that (re)produce inequalities through naturalization and legitimation. Certain feminist strands, like transnational feminism, feminist political ecology and radical feminism are the tool to do this and provide people with different cultural pedagogies, thus consciousness that is necessary for agency and empowerment. A counter-argument could be that within the neoliberal and capitalist systems, as well as feminist strands like liberal- and postfeminism this is also happening, but I will disagree. I argue that to be able to offer alternatives that really challenge the problematic contemporary system, solutions should also be looked at outside of this system. To strengthen my argument I will reflect upon personal experiences and thoughts.

## The power of ideologies

My journey to identify myself as feminist started on the 31st of August, 2015. This nowadays goes together

with identifying myself as a girl, white and middle class, besides many other things that I already identified myself with.

Before, I did not identify myself as a feminist. My mother, a.k.a. 'Dolle Mina' (Mad Mina), was a very active feminist when she was younger in times that it was necessary to be one (second wave feminism in the Netherlands). At least, that is how I felt. When I was bored, I enjoyed reading the magazine 'Opzij', a feminist magazine that she receives for decades, but I always felt a bit contemptuous about it. You could say that I had a post-feminist perspective: gender equality had already largely been achieved (Gill, 2009) and emphasising and continue to 'whine' about it, was not going to make people have a better attitude towards women or feminism. I think that this is how a lot of people perceive feminism, which is I think a consequence of a certain ideological way in which we are used to think. Ideologies reflect the interests and values of a certain dominant group and make them seem self-evident, natural and thus accepted by ordinary people, which makes inequality and subordination look just (Sato, 2016). Ideologies at work that I am referring to here are neoliberalism, capitalism and imperialism in which patriarchy is deeply embedded. Some of the consequences of these ideologies are as followed: the world is looked at in terms of economic welfare, citizenship is exercised through consumption, binaries/dualisms are made between for example the individual and social, the public and the private, men and women, to which certain hierarchical values are ascribed (Ramamurthy, 2003).

I personally see these aspects as having very problematic consequences. They serve to perpetuate inequalities and subordinate those who do not 'fit in'. I will try to explain this by using the concept of identity, that is always relational. Identities are formed through the process of 'othering': you identify yourself through distinguishing yourself from what you are not (Hegel, 1971). This in itself is not necessarily harmful - what is harmful, is the fact that some (characteristics) are valued higher than others. This valuing, however is a socially constructed idea, that gets naturalised and self-evident through interpellation and by ways of this legitimizes inequalities and exclusion of 'others'. This happens both unconsciously and without intention, as well as conscious and intended in order to serve the needs of the dominant to perpetuate their power. The fact that ideas around race and gender are social constructions (Vance, 1998) are undermined and hidden, in order to make above described work. Interpellation

is a process by which ideology constitutes the nature of individual subjects identities through institutions and discourses of hailing them in social interaction (Althusser, 2006). Examples of these kind of institutions and discourses through which this interpellation happens are media and education, that serve as cultural pedagogy: it teaches peoples certain values, social relations and identities (Kellner, 2011). Again, this does not happen very consciously. These function as technologies of domination, which means that powerful dominant people influence the mass by using certain technologies that send particular ideological messages. It is however not just top-down domination, since that would cause a lot of resistance and non-acceptance from the mass. It goes together with technologies of the self which causes people not to feel dominated, but in contrast even enabled by these ideologies like capitalism (e.g. we enjoy consuming; Foucault, 1988).

The most problematic of these processes I argue is that things become naturalised and self-evident and we thus ignore what is hidden underneath and is reproducing inequalities in favour of this dominant group. People's identities are derived from internalization of the meanings and representations produced by advertisers and corporations. It becomes so embedded in cultural/societal structures on what is seen as accepted behaviour and norms, that it has a big influence on people's individual ideas about themselves and the world, as well as how they behave in it. It is exactly what the structure/agency debate is about: to what extent are we as individuals in our behaviour and ways of seeing the world determined by society and thus socially constructed and to what extent do we also have agency to think and act individually outside of these structures (Delgado, 2016). Structure is very strong and always very present, but we also definitely have agency. This agency however, is for a big part dependent on alternative and counterhegemonies that critique and make these hidden and naturalized assumptions of how we should look, value and behave in the world visible. I argue that this is key and that this is what feminism to me is about. It is about a much wider political focus beyond just looking at women, in which equality and quality of life are key. Feminism is a way of viewing the world in a certain way, in which not just gender is important as well as questions around other issues like intersectionality (Bryant & Pini, 2011), but also alternative ways of perceiving and thinking about the world, outside of the accepted neoliberal and capitalist norms. At least, for particular kinds of non-depoliticized feministic strands like radical feminism, feminist political ecology and transnational feminism (Vance, 1998) (Patil, 2011), unlike for example liberal feminism (Bullbeck 2001) -although it is difficult to determine a boundary that decides which belong to this category and which not.

## Personal reflection

Until now, I problematized ideologies that I feel can be best described as capitalism and neoliberalism. I briefly explained that I do this because these (re)produce inequalities, but I did not fully elaborate on what

my understanding of this is and why this in itself and especially the naturalization of it is problematic. In this paragraph I aim to do this by ways of self-reflection.

Like I briefly described above, I did not see myself as a feminist before starting my gender minor and thus before starting to be aware of the discourses that naturalized and legitimized my ideas about gender aspects. There were however specific moments in which I started to gain certain cultural capital that gave words and theories to things I always inherently felt strange about, but could not put clear words or explanations to. Thoughts and naturalized ways of thinking became contested which made it easier to evolve my thinking, while at the same time making this kind of thinking more strong and legitimized. It turned my insecurity and sometimes emotionally painful feelings into feelings of empowerment. They started to matter, instead of being just there and feeling like a barrier. The feelings of not being good enough as a person/woman now turned into anger towards systems that made society value certain behaviours and ways of thinking and even normalizing them, that used to make me weak. Especially valuable to me was the recognition that this had nothing to do with how we (I) are born, which would be an essentialist argument and something that is naturalized and not to be contested. In contrast: it is a social construct and even goes further: these are ideas that are (purposely) perpetuated to serve certain interests of dominant people, making others less valuable and unequal in society.

I refer here to the capitalist, neoliberal ideology that creates binaries between multiple intersectional characteristics and therefore presents white, western, heterosexual (Christian, middle aged) men in opposite to 'the rest', everything that they are not, thus not masculine but 'feminine'. It is not just valued more, but even people that are subordinated by this system come to see it as normal and do not even consciously recognize their own subordination - it is maybe merely a 'gut' feeling that you cannot do a lot with if you do not explicitly realise it- let alone tackle it if the majority of people thinks otherwise. Personally this culminated into almost actively denying my own femininity. I only had guy friends and I considered girls as annoying, because all they ever cared about was what they looked like and gossiping. Guys were at least rational. I did not identify myself with other girls and used this as my power. I was 'one of the guys'. This happened all unconsciously and was a way to empower my own individual position as a woman, while deepening the structural gender hierarchies by perceiving and portraying myself like this. I was however of course still perceived as one by the world. Now I can see that I did not necessarily want to cut myself loose from identifying myself as being female, but I did want to remove myself from the negative connotation the female gender had. I did this in ways of valuing the masculine traits I had and emphasising these towards others. Instead of saying that it is unfair that women are portrayed like this, I detached myself

from being a woman. I think this happens a lot, which is very problematic. Girls face a double standard in which it is expected from them that they are sexy and outgoing, while having to be modest if you do not want to be called a slut. You have to be caring, but not too emotional and rational 'like a man'. Having woman-like characteristics is often portrayed as a bit stupid and annoying, but men need you to be this way in order for them to feel masculine and in order for them to be able to enjoy you. I am not at all saying that this is indeed what all men want and would never want to change. No, they are also subject to certain expectations that tell them to behave in certain ways that they do not feel as their own, and are also struggling with this. They too are 'victims' of this naturalized ideology. I am thus actively stating that feminism is not just about women. It is about tackling broader structures of power hierarchies that touch both men and women while taking into account different intersectional characteristics, and even animals and environments. It tries to tackle expectations, hierarchies and power relations that do wrong to all of the above mentioned. I do think, however, that men feel attacked more easily by feminism, because it almost actively attacks their masculinity: the only thing that society has made them think they can derive value from. Also, I do think that especially women are victims of this and patriarchal societies does serve a lot of men's rights. For me personally an important aspect in the different problems men and women face on the basis of this biology and gender ascribed to it is related to sexuality. Why do we need to teach girls how to say no? Because it is deeply embedded in our male-dominant culture to please the men and to not even question this. Men's needs are the starting point, but maybe even the biggest problem is that we do not consciously recognise them as men's needs. What I mean by saying this is that if women and society as a whole were very conscious about this and really experienced and viewed it as subordination, it would be way less accepted by the women undergoing it. This is already the case with certain sexual abuse in which it is very clear that a woman is being raped, for example, but this is not so much the case for so called 'less serious' types of sexual harassment that are not even considered as such. Then women are more or less expected to 'deal with it', 'laugh it off', 'stop taking it so seriously' or even show acceptance to not exclude yourself too much. At least, those are my experiences. In other words: women are the one to get blamed when they speak up in a situation in which someone else does something to them that they do not want. I think that everyone who would be consciously aware of this would think that this is absolutely not right. With this I even mean a lot of men that are showing this kind of behaviour. They are partially maybe even themselves being put in these situations through expectations of society on how to be masculine. Challenging the acceptance of these self-evident ideologies should thus be aimed at everyone in society for it to work and really change deep structural inequalities for all.

### Conclusion

The main claim of this essay was that especially the

naturalization of ideology is dangerous and hides important norms, values and thoughts that are accepted by society as self-evident and not to be questioned (too much), which legitimizes subordination and inequality as I tried to describe with my personal experience and reflections above. It shows the power of structure versus agency. To challenge this is however not impossible. What in my opinion is needed for this are contra/alternative ways of thinking, that reveal these accepted ideologies and the consequences it has, so people can be aware of them and deal with it in ways that they feel are appropriate and just. To me, this is what feminism aims to do. It aims to challenge the shortcomings of capitalist and neoliberalist thinking that produce negative consequences for gender hierarchies, while failing to recognise differences within both gender and thus further intersectional aspects like race, class, sexuality and ethnicity as well as 'non-western' experiences. I did not talk about these immensely important aspects in this essay because I chose to take my personal experiences as a way of strengthening my argument, and since I am in a lot of ways very privileged, thus fail to address these issues in this essay.

My argument and that of some feminists goes a bit further, namely that in order for this to work, alternatives need to be sought outside of the system that you are trying to challenge. In the words of Lorde (2003): "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house". So while I am very critical towards feminist strands that I consider as not doing this (enough) like liberal- and postfeminism that tend to look for alternatives in for example citizenship through consumerism and thus in my view deepening and hiding the problems even more, I am applauding others who do.

'A democratic civilisation will save itself if it makes the language of the dominant image into a stimulus for critical reflection and not an invitation for hypnosis.' (Eco, 1979)

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# GENDER, IDENTITY AND CULTURE: AN OVERVIEW OF MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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Master

Somewhat unexpectedly, learning about gender through this course became a very personal endeavour. While I had set out to collect more information on the gender disparities that determine development projects, it brought to me greater questions of who and what I am, and what my position is in this society. Growing up in the Netherlands I had always considered myself free from stereotypes of gender and ethnicity, yet the course illuminated me on subjects such as participation and agency, while questioning society and its constructs. It became clear: the act of identifying the self is not innocent.

This contemplation of the self reminded me of an incident that happened when I was traveling through Indonesia. I had just wanted to board a ferry from an east-Bali village to Java, when a police officer pulled me and my boyfriend aside. A passport check is what he intended to do, but upon seeing my passport details he became deeply suspicious. In a harsh tone, as to assert his authority and dominance, he asked me where I was from. I had barely finished my sentence when he countered me with the question of why I had an Indonesian surname. When I answered that both my parents are from Indonesia, he replied with a single "No.". He continued: "No, you are not from Indonesia, tell me where your parents are from and tell me the truth. Chinese, you must be Chinese. Or no, Japanese. You are Japanese." A group of Indonesian women on the ferry later informed me that Indonesian women never really travel independently, let alone travel with one foreign male companion. Also, and I should not be offended, I did not look Indonesian.

The incident had left me taken aback, but had also raised some questions on part of how my gender had rendered me to a certain ethnic group, and how perceptions on ethnicity determined the sense of belonging to a community. In my case, I grew up believing that I am Indonesian because I was different from all the other children, but this became strongly contested when I visited Indonesia years later. Despite my Indonesian surname and ability to speak Indonesian, I was still being perceived as an individual that did not match with the image of an Indonesian young woman, and therefore must belong to some other community. Conversely, my imagination of being Indonesian that I had formed in the Netherlands, somehow did not correspond with being Indonesian in Indonesia. I could only conclude that both my ethnic and gender

identity are subject to the environment I would be in, and therefore my identity is fluid.

Throughout my studies of Southeast Asia, I have come to learn about the conflicts that have determined Indonesian cultural life and how this heightened gender differences, particularly for those migrating to the Netherlands like my parents' families. In the turmoil of decolonization, the new Indonesian state and its citizens had to re-imagine what it meant to be Indonesian and what the new nation should look like. With Java being the political, economic and cultural center, anything that was perceived 'innately Indonesian' was added to the new Indonesian identity, and certainly any form of sympathy for its old colonizer did not belong in this consideration. This had put my mother's family in serious trouble: in Indonesia's struggle for independence, my mother's family had collaborated with the Dutch. This was however not without reason. The Lang family lived in the northern part of Sulawesi, an island northeast in the archipelago known for its incredibly spicy food and its equally hot-headed inhabitants. Until today, a strong sense of pride on being Manadoese is maintained by its people, and any other cultural or ethnic identity is generally perceived as 'lower' but also as the enemy. Amongst the Manadoese community, including some members of my mother's family, there are some who believe that Sulawesi should claim its own sovereignty. Therefore, when it became evident that Javanese culture would dominate the new Indonesian state, Sulawesi saw that it was necessary to stand up against a centralized idea of Indonesia through various means.

One of the options was to join the Permesta rebellion, its main objective being to protest against the unequal political and economic development that culminated in the archipelago (Hewitt, 2015). It was however far more common to support the Dutch in any way possible, in their desperate attempt to keep their beloved 'Indies'. Thus, while my grandfather fought alongside the Dutch, my grandmother took the family to hide in the forests. When the Dutch finally accepted their defeat and the colony's independence in 1957, years after Indonesia proclaimed the new independent state in 1945, collaborators were offered a choice: stay in Indonesia and face social exclusion and other retributions, or migrate to the Netherlands. The Dutch government promised housing and financial support for Indonesians who had been in service of the Dutch military, a seemingly far friendlier alternative to a life of continued oppression in Indonesia.

Little did my mother's family know that a life in the Netherlands did not exclude social, political and economic discrimination. Their new home had rendered them Indonesian, but their anti-Javanese and thus anti-Indonesian sentiments had not faded away. In any way they could, they tried to separate themselves from this Indonesian identity: their lingua franca became Dutch, their music interests were attributed to Dutch tastes and the girls in the family became feminists. It is therefore ironic that my mother chose to marry my Javanese father. According to my mother's family, he is the embodiment of everything that is 'traditionally Indonesian', that is, dominating over culture, ethnicity and gender. They were convinced that he would create an environment in which my mother would be hierarchically lower than my father, as Javanese/Indonesians do. It was however a matter of pride, rather than an issue of gender inequality that initiated this family conflict. Even with the girls in my mother's family being feminists to different extents, the boys continued to be privileged, simply because they earned more money for the family and were therefore entitled to have their own rooms and more food.

This image of my father turned out to be merely an imagined one, but in a sense my father is indeed traditional, if traditional should mean that one cherishes his heritage. Until today, he still likes to go to Indonesian gatherings, go on holidays to Indonesia every year and eats Indonesian food cooked by himself every day: anything that is different from Indonesia is just bland, like the *belandas* (Dutch). It so happened that me and my brother grew up with two different sets of ideas on being Indonesian. My mother taught us that we are different from the Dutch, so we are to assimilate into Dutch culture as much as possible. For me this had meant that I had to become strongly independent, educated and adventurous. Simultaneously, my father taught us that we are different from the Dutch, and we need to maintain this different identity as much as possible. It is in this construct that the image of the traditional Indonesian young woman returned: calm, docile, always smiling.

My parents never really seemed to be conscious of the fact that their ideas of Indonesia and being Indonesian were in fact constructed, as many diasporans often tend to do. In adapting to their new homes, they have created an own sense of belonging through a process of selecting and rejecting memories of their homeland. However, this has resulted in differing conceptions of Indonesia and the Indonesian identity, rather than just a singular collective image. As Avtar Brah (2005) argues: "... it is within this confluence of narrativity that a 'diasporic community' is differently imagined under different circumstances." (p. 180). In my mother's case it meant a complete rejection of what she believed to be Indonesia, which rendered her belonging to a community that no longer bears the cultural characteristics that had distinguished them as diaspora in the first place. Of course, to their hosts, they were still the foreign visitors of a failed colony. On the other hand, my father selected

elements of Indonesian culture and assimilated this into his own perception of 'Indonesianness'.

This form of revivalism unfortunately often carries a side-effect that some existing gender norms from the homeland are copied and implemented (Tajuddin & Stern, 2015). The image of the obedient Indonesian female, but also the strongly masculine Indonesian male, were thus perpetuated and disguised in a nationalist agenda. While my father encouraged independence, he preferred his daughter to stay close to home because this was part of a traditional Indonesian household. Equally, many of my female Indonesian friends living in the Netherlands complain about their parents being too intrusive to their lives, requiring their daughters to adopt elements of the ultimate Indonesian housewife. The argument would be that this is simply "how it is supposed to be", as "we are Indonesian" and certainly not Dutch.

A culmination of this ideology is to be found in the many Indonesian events organized in Holland for the purpose of strengthening the sense of belonging, for example the annual Mister and Miss Indonesisch pageant. On its website, it states that it is the mission of the pageant to remind second and third generation Indonesians in the Netherlands of the beautiful and refined culture of Indonesia. It claims to form a beacon for those who feel forgotten in the Dutch society as they adapt quickly to their host country. The pageant's organization invite people to "Come and enjoy Indonesian culture, by our own youth, in our own country!". A few things come to mind upon reading the website. One is that in this representation of Indonesia, one could wonder whether this pageant depicts a complete and accurate picture of Indonesian culture. Second is that whether the participating boys and girls identify themselves being Indonesian youth and not something else as the website claims. As with all pageants, the competition heightens stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, but here this is defined by an imagination of a distant homeland. Amongst other things, participants of this pageant are encouraged to master Indonesian dance or martial arts, depending on what their gender is rather unfortunately, there has been rarely a case in which these gender norms are bent. Such events do not only form an occasion for exercising the constructed Indonesian identity within the Dutch society, but also for perpetuating gender norms in a particular cultural context.

It is interesting to see that many of the young adults who identify themselves being Indonesian, including myself, find themselves confronted with their upbringing in a Dutch environment when they visit Indonesia (De Vries, 2009). Many claim to be too "cheesed up" when commenting on the implicit style of communication in Indonesia, the economic inequality and the gendered division of labour. Therefore, what had once set them aside in the Dutch society, no longer existed in the Indonesian context. Sometimes it becomes a reason for activism, as the host and homeland are being compared and weighed off. After my first visit to Indonesia, I too felt the responsibility of tackling the unfair distribution of welfare.



Surely, because I had enjoyed growing up in Holland, it did not have to mean that others needed to suffer? So I volunteered for an NGO aiming to achieve women's empowerment through various gatherings and lectures. It was one of my first experiences of activism, but one that I later had come to understand as motivated under privileged pretences (Sturgeon, 2009). Help was needed, because I believed and knew that things could be better, as I had experienced myself in the Netherlands. And indeed, help was wanted, but the help the NGO offered was not always received with enthusiasm. There would be occasions in which we would be condemned for not being Indonesian but foreign. I remember one particular woman saying: "There they are, the bule-bule (white foreigners) coming to rescue us on their mighty white stallions". My agency as the Indonesian girl, born and raised in Holland apparently had the opposite effect in trying to help the other, as it was my privilege that perpetuated the dualism of donor-beneficiary.

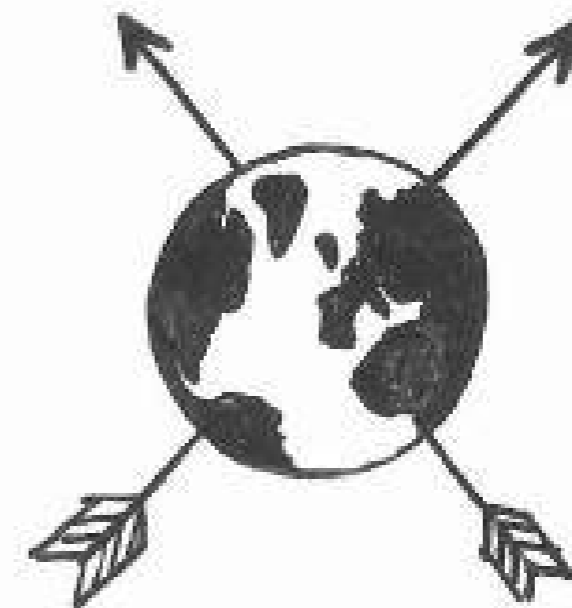
To conclude, in contemplating on the above-mentioned experiences, I had come to realize that being an Indonesian young woman was always an act of being something from the other. Indonesian life in the Dutch context had presented certain configurations on womanhood that were to be adhered to. Yet, the same Indonesian lifestyle became contested in Indonesia because its Dutch context reframed it as being privileged. Therefore the extent to which is identified with this Indonesian identity does not guarantee membership to the community: the 'community' is as much about identification, as it is about exclusion. Ultimately, I can conclude that the Indonesian identity to me is fluid, and its sense of belonging subject to change. Its properties, including its norms and values, are very much constructed and it is therefore always useful to question proclaimed authenticity.

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## Gender Aspects of Global Trade



# THE FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AS A TOOL TO ANALYZE STRUCTURES AND RELATED ISSUES

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## Introduction

By means of this essay I will explain my motivations to choose the minor “gender aspects of sustainable food systems” at Wageningen University (WUR), and how Feminist Political Ecology closely connects to this.

Since I did not start at university right after secondary school, I had the time and space to develop myself personally, while simultaneously explore the topics in which I am intrinsically interested in and wish to learn about more professionally. Therefore my choice of study is much more goal oriented than most of my peers. Currently I am following the undergraduate program named “future planet studies” at University of Amsterdam, which is an interdisciplinary curriculum about how to manage the earth sustainably. Within this course, I was unfortunately missing some disciplines to fully analyze the earth and its systems as a whole. Therefore I choose to expand my knowledge at WUR. The concepts taught in the course “Gender and natural resource management” enabled me to learn to analyze in depth the social structures linked to the global food system, which is my personal interest. In particular feminist political ecology I find very interesting and eye-opening from an analytical point of view, as with the lessons learned from decades of gender inclusion in policy and development programs. According to these theories I will justify my argument that the feminist political ecological framework is a fundamental tool to analyze structures and related issues throughout the global food system.

## Why is gender important when looking at food systems?

Gender is fluid and highly contextual, expressed through and in relation to race, religion, class, caste, ethnicity, environment, and much more (Joshi, 2015; Flora, 2015). The use, management and knowledge concerning natural resources and the environment are highly gendered (Joshi, 2016). Therefore a gender-aware approach will contribute to a better understanding of social relations, cultures, beliefs and values, while at the same time it reveals existing power structures that shape a food system across scale (Flora, 2015). Vice versa, the global food system, manifested in the globalisation of the agro-food system, has huge implications for gender relations; by marginalizing the poor through coercive labor opportunities, reinforcing conflict, altering ecosystems and limiting food sovereignty (Joshi, 2015). Hence the acknowledgment that

gender plays an important role in both the agricultural practices and the formation of local and global policies, is a step towards a holistic understanding of the global food system.

## Why is including a gender approach in food and development policies not enough?

When taking gender relations into account whilst analyzing a food system, or a problem within the food system, one needs to realize that huge steps have been made already. For decades, feminist scholars have worked hard towards the inclusion of gender in policy and development agenda’s around the world, and achievements have been made. Where gender equality was first part of a millennium development goal, it is now the 5th sustainable development goal (UN, 2016).

Bridging organizations such as the Women, Environment, and Development Organization, the Women, Environment, and Development Network, and the Worldwide Network for Women oppose their local concerns to the international policy area. These organizations stress the need for more equity throughout different levels of ethnic groups, castes, gender and generations in development (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter & Wangari, 1996). Since the 1980s, one commonly used concept to include women is gender mainstreaming: the integration of a critical number of women (of at least 30%) into different levels of institutions to integrate gender issues into ‘business as usual’ (Buckingham, 2004). However, the inclusion of marginalized groups through democratic representation in formal organizations does not necessarily tackle inequality (Cleaver, 1999). Gender mainstreaming can reveal and reinforce the current structures, as the factors that have shaped the existing imbalance in the community are not questioned. Joshi (2011) argues that involving marginalized women in formal institutions does not directly change anything in the structures that cause the inequity, as the social identities that disregard them are still intact. This does not mean that the representation of women is not important - on the contrary, in the past 30 years significant steps have been made to address gender issues within local and global policies through gender mainstreaming (Buckingham, 2004).

Another common drawback of the inclusion of a gender perspective into development agenda’s is that it is often assumed to be implementable as top-down essentialism (Joshi, 2014). This narrow approach

is embedded in certain gender myths. Joshi (2014) determines two gender myths in the development discourse. The first view is that there exists a feminist solidarity, in which women are almost always egalitarian and support politics that promote equality and sustainable development. The oversimplification of women as a homogeneous group of people that have the same aspirations and needs is problematic because it ignores the inequalities among women (Joshi, 2014). The representation of women should not be underestimated, but the question remains if it directly contributes to the challenging of gender and social power relations (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2007).

The second gender myth Joshi (2014) describes is the inherent link between women and nature, where women are seen as victims of environmental degradation. The difficulty of this perception is that it reinforces the position of women as carers and nurturers, continuously seen as able and willing ‘fixers’ of development and the environment (Joshi, 2014). Therefore the emphasis on the intrinsic relation between women and nature can strengthen existing structures of gender inequality. These gender myths and their consequences, together with gender mainstreaming, demonstrate that including gender in policy and development is not sufficient. Reflecting on the past decades however, steps have been made towards gender equality.

## What does Feminist Political Ecology add?

A next step of analysis is a subfield of Political Ecology: Feminist Political Ecology (FPE). Both share the focus on empirical data at local and household level, FPE however adds the dimension of gendered power relations from local to global levels (Elmhirst, 2011; Rocheleau, 2008). This subfield provides an institutional analysis that considers gender as a key variable in the shaping of processes of sustainable development, as gender shapes the access and control to resources one may have (Ross, 1997). Mostly, it acknowledges the very complex and contextual nature of social relations. It entails to unpack concepts as “women”, “men”, “households”, “communities” and “institutions”, and how these are interconnected with class, caste, race, culture, and ethnicity (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter & Wangari, 1996). By this, feminist political ecology provides a critical analysis across institutional levels. This wide scope provides a general framework for evaluation (Ross, 1997).

Additionally, this approach of analysis seeks to comprehend how ongoing transformations in the global food system cause different challenges and opportunities for various groups of women and men at a local scale (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter & Wangari, 1996). It enables an understanding that the consequences of a certain institutional policy are, on the ground, far more complex than women being the simple victims of it (Joshi, 2015), as brought forward in the aforementioned gender myths.

## Obstacles

FPE acknowledges a nuanced analysis of the complex

connections between knowledge, power and practice in nature-society relations. By this, it excludes assumptions, and therefore the possible drawbacks of gender myths and gender mainstreaming. However, the fact that FPE takes this complexity across scale into account makes it likewise difficult to trace and connect knowledge. At this moment, relatively little research on the global food system has been done about the gendered dimensions at other institutional levels than the household or community (Joshi, 2015). Hence research on the gendered dimensions at higher institutional levels is needed but not easy to obtain – for, often, large NGOs benefit from the same power structures that cause inequalities at a local scale. According to Herman-Monstert (2016) it therefore necessary to first challenge the power structures within these institutions before the same institutions can challenge equality effectively elsewhere. Further, bridging between environmental and feminist movements can bring difficulties, as women organizations do not necessary care about the environment (Joshi, 2014) nor do environmental organization directly see the importance of gender equality.

## Conclusion

Current neoliberal trends throughout the global food system are not only reinforcing gender inequality (Joshi, 2015), but at the same time causing environmental degradation. All together, these trends challenge food security by limiting food sovereignty (Joshi, 2015). Far too often, a gender dimension is missing. Therefore it is important that an institutional analysis including the complexity of gender interrelations is present when shaping new policies and development agenda’s. The downsides of gender mainstreaming and gender myths can be precluded when a FPE approach is integrated, as merely the notion of gender is not sufficient. Firstly to critically analyze the impacts of the current trends and structures on nature-human interrelations that shape the global food system (Joshi, 2015), but above all to be able to challenge these structures and strive towards sustainable development across scale, space and time. By “enabling the inclusion and empowerment of marginalized chain actors – the poor, women, and certain ethnic groups” (Joshi, 2015, p.169), truly sustainable food systems can be shaped.

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# SWEET FRUITS, BITTER REALITIES: IMPACTS ON WOMEN'S LIVES IN A GLOBALISED AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM

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## Introduction

In this essay I will discuss the impact of globalised agriculture on women and their roles in and outside the household. I pose the question whether or not it is empowering for women to participate in agricultural export labour. Dominant development discourses claim that liberalisation of agriculture has the potential to empower women, while critical feminist research argues that the very nature of export agriculture and thereby globalisation is inherently disempowering for women. Is it really empowering for women to get a minimum income and a place in the chain of the capitalist world economy? Through analysis I discuss the power structures that underlie the globalised agricultural system and its ultimate beneficiaries. By looking at the positive and negative effects of women's participation in globalised agriculture I intend to identify answers to the former question. In order to highlight the concept empowerment critiques on participation by Cleaver (1999) have been useful. Throughout the text, a case study of Morocco's strawberry industry is used in order to provide practical examples.

## Impacts of globalised agro-export industries

First of all, it is of vital importance to have an overview of the effects, both positive and negative, which globalised export agriculture has on women. Research on the grape sector in Chile reveals that changes in the global political economy have had far-reaching impacts on the lives of women in many parts of the world who have become integrated into the world's production and consumption processes (Bee, 2000). This fact is true for many women in different countries. Bee states that a global fruit market in which fresh fruits can be sourced all-year round, disregarding the seasons, is a common feature of such processes. Often, governments promote agro-export production as a strategy of economic development, and export of fresh fruits is a main aspect of such changing agricultural systems. Furthermore, Bee (2000) highlights that it is common practice to employ large numbers of women in this globalised production of fresh fruits and other non-traditional agricultural products. Employment in the fruit sector is highly gendered, and notions of female characteristics have made women preferred to handle delicate fruits. Therefore, a growing feminisation and seasonality of agricultural production labour is often associated with the agro-export economy (Bee, 2000). In 2014, a study by NGO Oxfam International was carried out on the working

conditions in the export berry sector in Morocco. It was observed that the work force in the sector is comprised of 75% to 90% women (Oxfam, 2015).

A substantial number of international development actors argue that globalisation has the potential to narrow traditional, contextual agrarian inequalities, including gender (Joshi, 2015). For instance, the World Development Report states that greater trade openness translates into more jobs and stronger connections to markets for many women, increasing their access to economic opportunities, resulting in a shift toward more egalitarian gender roles and norms. Indeed this seems to be a promising vision for the future. Another argument that is often repeated by mainstream development actors is that waged employment and individual agency go hand in hand in the context of globalised agriculture (Joshi, 2015). This thinking has been employed in numerous Women In Development efforts, by including women into markets and economies they ought to obtain an equal position to men. I argue that this does not challenge the unequal power structures that stir the economies and lie at the heart of globalised export agriculture. It is a vivid example of liberal feminist thinking, in which development and empowerment equate economic development and entrepreneurship. When including women in labour positions, men continue to hold control over decision making and key assets (Joshi, 2015).

Similarly, drawing on the Moroccan strawberry case, the approach of including women in globalised agriculture had been adopted by the Moroccan government as well under the guise of an agricultural strategy (the Green Morocco Plan). New agricultural development strategies together with a free trade agreement with the EU have boosted the countries' export numbers, mainly in the berry sector. By implementing the agricultural development strategy, it was promised to attract private investment into the agricultural sector and create thousands of jobs and alleviate persisting poverty (Oxfam, 2014). This type of empowerment, by including women in the globalised labour force, does not require any change or transformation in deeply patriarchal and unequal relationships. Based on this fact I argue that women will continue to be in a subordinate position, despite earning a minimum wage and working in public space, since the power structures at the basis of globalised agriculture and export markets are unequal.

### Double burdens

Furthermore, one should bear in mind that while women are employed in export agriculture, packing plants or harvesting strawberries on large fields, their reproductive responsibilities remain prevalent and productive work is only added to it, resulting in long labour hours both at home and in the public space. Therefore, women carry double burdens. As Joshi (2015) argues, there is little evidence of how employment opportunities in globalised agriculture intersect with reproductive responsibilities, and if the enhancement of employment is after all empowering for women. A part from tangible obstacles and inequalities, women who participate in the globalised labour force are also carrying an invisible burden, one imposed by social constructions of gender identities, which prevents them from equally negotiating their relations with the (often) male labour supervisors and employers. To illustrate this statement, I draw on a paper published by Bossenbroek, Errahj and Elalime (2014) researching the impacts of agricultural changes on women labourers in the Sais region of Morocco. Socially constructed notions of appropriate femininity and masculinity are found to heavily influence the division of labour in the fields and the way female labourers are perceived by the community. Men ought to be strong, provide for their households, and handle technologies while women are expected to take care of the domestic sphere, and in terms of labour perform the tasks with docility. It was found that due to these social constructions a gender wage gap exists between men and women, offering women a salary of 3050% less than men. This inequality was justified by claims of men's work as being more difficult and physically demanding (Bossenbroek et al., 2014). Women find themselves forced to negotiate their identity as labourer in order to preserve their honour and that of their husbands and families (Bossenbroek et al., 2014). In Moroccan society, women are expected to primarily be occupied with domestic activities, and when entering the public domain as labourers they come to be identified with the streets which has very negative connotations. Thus, Moroccan women labourers are not simply harvesting strawberries, they are challenging traditional notions of gendered roles divided between men and women by taking up labour that is traditionally not assigned to them. Among women, older, divorced or widowed women enjoy a certain privilege in entering such labour sectors (Bossenbroek et al., 2014). This reminds one of the need to take the concept of intersectionality into account.

Critical feminist research takes into account both negative and positive aspects of change, therefore one should consider possible enabling effects of waged labour for women in export agriculture. The findings of Bee in the Chilean grape sector show that although women's employment is often highly unstable and relatively poorly paid, it does bring with it the potential for their empowerment and the re-working of household relations (Bee, 2000). Furthermore, she states that waged employment gives women access to

organisations that challenge traditional gender roles and campaign for women's rights. Following these findings she concludes that that waged employment in globalised sectors brings benefits for women in terms of earnings, increased decision making within the household and participation in public organisations (Bee, 2000).

### Empowerment unravelled

The thoughts of Cleaver (1999) on participation in development can be applied to the latter statement. Participation is often linked to social responsibility, to characterise non-participation as irresponsible, which discredits some individuals (Cleaver, 1999). Sometimes, it is more beneficial or easier not to participate in organisations and development efforts. This approach, either a rational strategy or unconscious practice, is well illustrated in the project of Oxfam that was implemented after carrying out the research on women labourers working conditions in the strawberry sector. The report states that "many women workers did not know their rights and did not wish to do the whole process to get their ID card..." Furthermore, it is argued that "this resistance made the administrative process supported by local NGO's much longer" (Oxfam, 2014). In the latter statement lies a contradiction, one that Cleaver argues to be a dichotomy on participatory development. This poses the question whether participation is a tool for better project outcomes or indeed a process that enhances capacity of individuals to improve their own lives, to initiate social change to advantage the marginalised (Cleaver, 1999). The report further explains how some women labourers preferred to maintain a certain level of informality and flexibility, or preferred to work hours exceeding the legal limit since they needed the income. This illustrates the argument of Cleaver (1999) on rational strategies of some individual's not to be empowered.

Moreover, it is important to take intersectionality into account when analysing the impact of globalised agricultural systems. Quantitative measures of wage employment blur overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation and other inequalities and the impact of agrarian transformations will depend on the varied starting positions of different women and men, based on their different personal and contextual situations (Joshi, 2015). Thus, one should avoid presuming a heterogeneous group of women in assessing the effects, both positive and negative, of wage labour in export agriculture. It is important to integrate national identity, gender, race, class, age and marital status into any analysis of the new global labour force. Ultimately, Bee (2000) poses the objection that even when women earn a significant proportion of the household income, old patterns of male dominance and women's central role in caring for children and housework remain slow to change.

### Rejecting mainstreaming, demanding change

We should not legitimise women's inclusion in the

existing economic power structures as empowerment, assuming that economic gains made by the powerful will automatically translate in benefits for the poor. True, radical empowerment discourse is rooted in and associated with both individual and class action, with the transformation of structures of subordination through radical changes in law, property rights, institutions of society (Cleaver, 1999). To me, promoting the inclusion of women into the globalised agricultural work force as a means of empowerment is not radical and a way to avoid challenging patriarchal and capitalist power structures and continue with business as usual. Capitalism depends on gendered and marginalised labour in order to keep prices low and profits high. I wonder how such a system can ever serve as a means of empowerment to women. A telling statement by Joshi (2015) implies that in reality, women remain "cheap workers" and the burden of poorly paid (productive) work and unpaid (reproductive) work combine to ensure that being exploited by capital is the fate of virtually all women in today's global economy. Opportunities for women in the agrarian sector might result in gains for some women, however, just these changes will not on their own, make women either less poor or more equal or empowered (Joshi, 2015).

### Conclusion

Throughout this essay I have presented positive and negative effects of women's employment in the globalised export sector. It is important to bear in mind that when profits are made, and people obtain access to wage labour, at which costs this is happening, which lives and environments are being marginalised to get to the ultimate goal of making profit. Finally, it are the retailers and transnational companies that gain the largest share of the profits from globalised agricultural systems (Vos, 2016). Globalised export agriculture will not have the potential to change gender and other inequalities in agrarian contexts. Without challenging existing power structures across the globe, without being aware of the gendered nature and class hierarchies of the institutions and companies themselves, without questioning the capitalist system in which profits should be made by all means, inequalities cannot be genuinely addressed. In order to shape a vision of an alternative and more just future for the ones who work in the fields to supply the global capitalist market, the following quote offers an inspiring way of thinking:

What would an economy look like in which nature mattered, in which people mattered, in which women and children and their future mattered, an economy not based on colonising and exploiting others and the earth for short sighted profit? (Mies, 2007)

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# CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES IN AGRO-EXPORT: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ACCESS TO TRADE UNIONS IN

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## Introduction

Nowadays, consumers want to eat every fruit or vegetable species during the whole year, regardless of the seasons. To satisfy this changing consumption pattern of mostly Northern consumers, many developing countries change their agricultural policies and governments promote agro-export production. The agro-export of fruit is often dependent on the employment of large numbers of women, integrating women into the world's production and consumption processes (Bee, 2000).

Proponents of agro-export argue that globalization has the potential to narrow contextual agrarian inequalities, thus also gender inequalities. Women would be connected to markets and economic opportunities are expected to reshape attitudes and norms about gender relations, which would encourage countries to promote gender equality. Globalization, and thus the agro-export of fruits, would create multiple gains for women (Joshi, 2015). Waged employment in the agro-export is seen to bring benefits for women "in terms of earning potential, increased decision-making within the household and participation in organizations beyond the domestic realm" (Bee, 2000, p. 256). It is assumed that these benefits create opportunities for women's empowerment and the re-working of household relations (Bee, 2000). On the contrary, opponents argue that globalization of agro-food and trade undermines food security, alters ecological landscape negatively and marginalize the poorest, including women, caused by traps of coercive wage labour opportunities which are inequitable and limits voice, dignity and food sovereignty (Joshi, 2015).

One statement of those in favour of agro-export will be central in this essay, namely: "waged employment frequently gives women access to organizations that challenge traditional gender roles and campaign for women's rights" (Bee, 2000, p. 256). With wage employment, Bee (2000) refers to employment in the agro-export of fruits. This statement assumes that the involvement of women in agro-export will give women access to organizations which will challenge traditional gender roles. Having knowledge on the banana sector, which I gained through my Bachelor thesis, and knowledge about what participation actually means (Cleaver, 1999), makes it hard for me to be convinced by the claim of a positive effect of agro-export.

Therefore, this essay will criticize this oversimplified statement, using two concepts; intersec-

tionality (Nightingale, 2011) and participation (Cleaver, 1999). These concepts help to strengthen my counter-argumentation against Bee's (2000) statement. In order to make this essay more convincing on why agro-export will not help to challenge traditional gender roles, I will focus on the banana industry and the involvement of women in trade unions in this industry. Since bananas are, in terms of volume, the most exported fruit in the world (Taylor & Scharlin, 2004), the banana industry is an appropriate case to use in this essay.

## Traditional gender roles in the banana industry

Banana cultivation is a labour-intensive activity and is performed under tropical temperatures which make it tough and uncomfortable work (Robinson, 2010). However, the banana industry creates a big source of income and employment for a lot of people in the exporting countries (Paggi & Spreen, 2003).

The banana industry can be seen as a highly gendered industry, since there exist a strong division of labour which is embedded in the local ways of thinking (Prieto-Carrón, 2006b). The banana industry values packing jobs as "a job for which women are seen as ideally suited" (Prieto-Carrón, 2006b, p. 7), and consequently, women are mostly employed in pack-house jobs. Due to this strong division of labour, men and women experience their work in the banana industry differently, with women in a marginalized position. The employees who experience the longest working hours are the ones who work in the pack-houses, whom are women. On average, women work 14 to 16 hours a day without overtime (Prieto-Carrón, 2006a; BananaLink, n.d. b). Additionally, there is a great gap between the wages earned by women and men in the banana industry; on average, women earn only a quarter to a third of what male packing workers earn. This is caused by the division of labour which determines that higher-paid jobs in the banana industry are male-dominated and lower-paid jobs female-dominated (Fruendt, 2009). The fact that women have to fulfil both productive and reproductive tasks creates an extra burden on women, which can increase health problems (Naranjo, 1999).

Another important aspect of the marginalization of women in the banana industry is the uncertainty women experience since there is only work for women when bananas are harvested. However, even in harvest periods women do not experience stable working hours since most of them work 'on call'; they work

depending the available work. Men experience much more stable working hours, since they are involved in cultivating and harvesting activities. Extra uncertainty for women is created because women pack-house workers are replaced by men. Companies argue that they prefer men since they see women as more expensive to employ because of their reproductive and maternity responsibilities (Prieto-Carrón, 2006b; Fruendt, 2009).

## Intersectionality

The strong culturally determined division of labour ensures that there is only work available for women in the harvest season, while men can access year-round employment. Bee (2000) argues that the temporary character of the work of women in the agro-export in Chile provide[s] women employment opportunities that extend their roles as unpaid family labour" (p. 259). Bee (2000) portrays the temporary character of the work of women in the agro-export as advantageous; work in the agro-export extends their family work in the household. This temporary work would ensure certainty in times when the harvest at the household plot, often crops for own consumption, fails. The temporary character of work in the agro-export ensures flexibility; women only have to work in the agro-export if it is necessary to complement their failed harvests (Bee, 2000; Vos, 2016).

However, an analysis of the banana industry shows that this temporary character of the work of women in the banana industry is disadvantageous. The temporary contracts given to women labourers have implications for the possibility to join a trade union since temporary workers are unable to be part of a trade union. Only after receiving a permanent contract, are workers in the banana industry able to join a trade union (Robinson, 2010). Having access to trade unions in the banana industry depends thus on the kind of contract a labourer receives. Since the division of labour in the banana industry – based on local ways of thinking – determines that women receive temporary contracts, it is for women impossible to join a trade union. The statement of Bee (2000) that waged employment will ensure access for women to join organizations which challenge gender roles, does not count for the banana industry. Women in the banana industry are involved in wage employment, but temporary wage employment does not give access to trade unions in the banana industry.

Analysing the root causes of inequalities between people who have access to and people who have no access to trade unions in the banana industry brings us to the gendered division of labour. Traditional gender roles determine the division of labour which gives women packing jobs and thus temporary contracts, which means that women do not have the possibility to join a trade union.

While in this case the inequalities related to access to trade unions were caused by gender, since women work as temporary labour forces and men as permanent labourers, inequalities can also be caused by many other aspects. Scholars who plea for the

concept of intersectionality argue that race, ethnicity, caste, class, religion and gender simultaneously influences a person's identity. You, as a person, are subjected to race, ethnicity, caste, class and gender. Therefore, while defining inequality, gender studies should focus beyond gender and incorporate other aspects of inequality (Nightingale, 2011; Joshi, 2016).

Using the concept of intersectionality indicates a gap in the statement of Bee (2000). Access to trade unions is according to Bee (2000) determined by whether women are involved in agro-export or not. However, the case study of the banana industry shows that other aspects, which are part of the identity of women, mainly being a temporary labourer, also influence their possibilities to be involved in trade unions. Bee (2000) only uses the concept of gender to describe the inequality that women experience, disregarding intersectional aspects like race or class. Likewise, the banana industry case study solely focuses on gender as the root cause of inequality. The banana industry reiterates stereotypes which regard women as ideally suited for packing jobs, but do not describe which kind of women are involved in these packing jobs. Their class, race, ethnicity or religion are still unknown after my analysis.

The case of the banana industry is in line with Bee (2000) who states that having access to a trade union is an important catalyser for change and improvement. "If any real improvements are to be seen on the ground workers must first be ensured the freedom to organize into trade unions, providing the capacity to improve their own working conditions through collective bargaining and the subsequent implementation of their basic labour rights" (BananaLink, n.d. a). The assumption of Bee (2000) can be criticised on the fact that she assumes that the involvement in wage employment gives people access to trade unions. However, this is not necessarily the case, since it has been shown that for the banana industry it depends on the kind of contract a labourer receives. The assumption made by representatives of the banana industry (BananaLink, n.d. a) is more nuanced and argues that all banana workers should have the freedom to organize, and thus also women workers with temporary contracts. However, the involvement and participation of all people in trade unions implies challenging traditional gender roles, which will be analysed in the next section, using a critical perspective towards participation.

## A critical view towards participation

Bee (2000) argues that just because women belong to the agro-export labour force, women would have access to organizations and trade unions which would challenge traditional gender roles. Nevertheless, can participation in the agro-export be equated with advantages for women in the form of challenging traditional gender roles?

Cleaver (1999) explains that participation in development became "something we believe in and rarely question" (p. 597). The statement of Bee (2000) contains the mistaken assumption that participation

is intrinsically a 'good thing' (Cleaver, 1999). Bee (2000) argues that participation can contribute to the improvement of women's situation in two ways. First of all, participation of women in agro-export industries would lead to the involvement of women in wage employment. Bee (2000) portrays wage employment for women as something positive. Despite the fact that women are employed, there exists a big gendered wage gap. Women workers performing packing tasks earn only a quarter to a third of what male banana packers earn (Frundt, 2009). The gendered wage gap shows that the participation of women in wage employment does not automatically lead to more equal gender roles, while Bee (2000) assumes that waged employment would provide more gender equality. Bee (2000) did not take into account the context of the height of wages, which causes the gendered wage gap to be disregarded by Bee (2000). Participation in agro-export industries is seen as intrinsically good; women's employment will lead to gender equality (Bee, 2000), while the negative side, namely the wage gap is not taken into account.

Secondly, Bee (2000) argues that the participation of women in wage labour gives women the possibility to participate in trade unions which challenge gender roles. The previous section of this essay argued that participation in wage labour is no guarantee of women getting involved in trade unions. Assuming that participation in employment will lead to the possibility of participating in trade unions does not take the context into account. In order for women to have access to trade unions, the right contract is needed. While women may be employed and receive a wage, it does not necessarily provide them with the advantages of having access to trade unions.

Bee (2000) thus argues that participation, both in agro-export and in waged employment, guarantees positive effects. Participation would contribute to challenging traditional gender roles, which would improve women their situation (Bee, 2000). This assumption can be criticized by following the thinking of Cleaver (1999) who states that "participation in itself is considered by many as empowering, regardless of the actual activity undertaken" (p. 598). Bee (2000) links women participation in waged employment to an improved situation for women in terms of earning potential, increased decision-making power within the household and participation in trade unions. Bee's (2000) statement does seem to assume that participation automatically empowers women, which involves the problematic notion that participation is the same as empowerment (Cleaver, 1999). Involvement in wage employment, will not empower women in the banana industry nor challenge traditional gender roles, since women cannot participate in organizations which challenge these gender roles due to their temporary contracts. Additionally, one can question whether these trade unions in the banana industry challenge traditional gender roles, even when women have access to them.

### Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to argue against a strong statement of Bee (2000) which suggests that the involvement of women in agro-export would improve women's situation, since women get the opportunity to be involved in organizations which challenge traditional gender roles. Using the banana industry as a case study, I argued that this assumption of Bee (2000) is mistaken and too simplified. The case study of the banana industry showed that intersectionality is important to describe women's identity to determine whether they have access to trade unions, since gender is not the only determinant which grants one access to a trade union in the banana industry. Furthermore, the type of contract also defines whether a women labourer can join a trade union. Bee (2000) is disregarding the concept of intersectionality in her assumptions.

The theory of participation of Cleaver (1999) has shown that a lot more is needed than only the involvement or participation of women in agro-export to challenge traditional gender roles. Bee (2000) directly relates the involvement of women in waged employment to the opportunity of challenging traditional gender roles. Bee (2000) equals participation in wage employment with the empowerment of women related to gender roles, which is too simplistic. She does not pay attention to the context of women participating in wage employment. The analysis of the banana industry showed that traditional gender roles which determine the division of labour are based on local ways of thinking (Prieto-Carrón, 2006b). Even Bee (2000) herself indicates that women are valued according to 'imaginary female characteristics' such as manual dexterity, which made women desirable for handling delicate fruit. This shows that any change in traditional gender roles in the banana agro-export industry should be started with challenging local notions of traditional gender roles. The fact that women cannot join trade unions in the banana industry – which is determined by the kind of contract women receive, which is determined by the local ways of thinking about appropriate gender roles and the division of labour – shows that the root causes of the gendered division of labour in the banana industry, which are deeper social structures, should first be challenged. These social structures which I point to are the local ways of thinking which determines the gendered division of labour.

However, we should not forget and it should be mentioned that even when women in the banana industry will get the opportunity to join a trade union, the question if trade unions will challenge traditional gender roles remains. However, if women labourers get the opportunity to join a trade union, this is the first step in the process of challenging traditional gender roles in the banana agro-export industry.

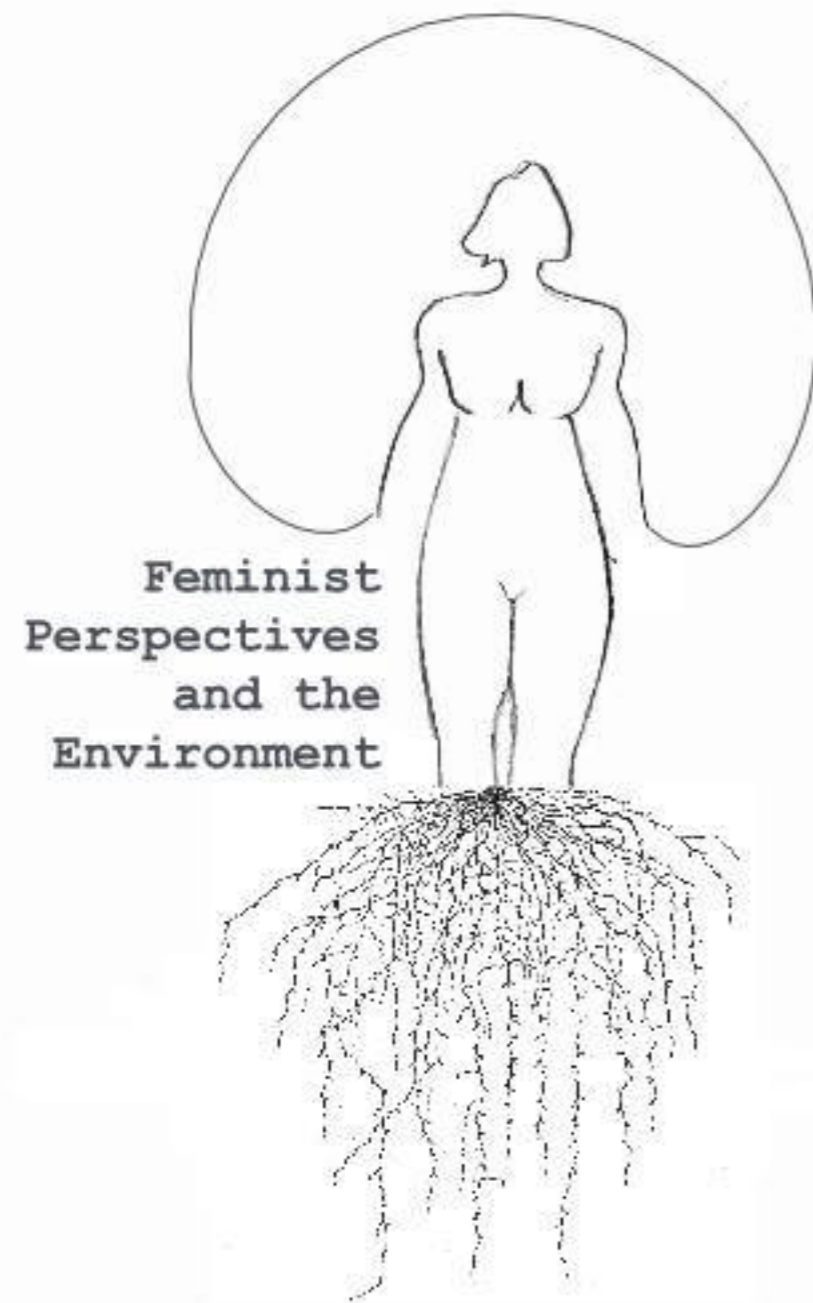
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# (Dis)CONNECTED WITH NATURE: ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM FROM AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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## Introduction

The rise and growth of ecofeminism has spanned a relatively short period, but it is nonetheless diverse and fluid. This movement that stands at the crossroads of environmentalism and feminism has been the target of heavy criticism, eventually giving rise to another wave of feminism concerned with the environment: feminist political ecology. Important arguments of those criticizing ecofeminism include the rejection of gender mainstreaming and the reinforcement of dualisms, both man/woman and intersectional. The latter is possibly most important. This essay aims to analyse the definition and diversity of ecofeminism as well as its vital criticism, looking at the actual benefits ecofeminism could produce for environmental activism. Environmental issues can have a distinct gender aspect, when it comes to natural resources, but some are environmentalist at the base and are still argued to call for an approach that includes gender. Moreover, this essay focuses on the duality between the Global North and South, and how ecofeminism can be applied to environmental activism or should be reshaped with intersectional dualities in mind.

## At the base of ecofeminism

The critical connections that exist between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are at the core of ecofeminism (Dankelman, 2016; Molyneux & Steinberg, 1995). The essentialist school of ecofeminism ascribes this to a particular relationship women have due to their biology, with a sharp argument that women's cycles such as fertility and pregnancy are coterminous with nature (Salleh, 1984). Mother Earth, as it is so fittingly called, is given feminine characteristics that women are in this way related to. In a way women then give a voice to nature. Another direction ecofeminism can take is the constructivist approach. Those who follow this theory argue that the social and economic structures that formed women's position in society produced environmental degradation in similar ways. This makes for a shared experience, thus placing women closer to nature. Both the essentialist and constructivist views use their own arguments to point out that women have a better place to argue on nature's behalf (Dankelman, 2016; Buckingham, 2004; Salleh, 1984). Ecofeminists Mies and Shiva argue that women have a deep understanding of nature through essence as well as experience (Molyneux & Steinberg, 1995).

It is complicated and possibly counterproduc-

tive to see ecofeminism as one distinct discourse. Rather it could be seen as an intersection of feminism and environmentalism that is constructed differently time and again, depending on context (Buckingham, 2004). Ecofeminist theory is thus also not coherent, but consists of interwoven accounts that perceive a connection between the domination of nature and women. Historically, Western societies have associated women with nature from the 1970s on, as a new wave of feminism arose along with the rise of environmentalist activism (Twine, 2001; Arora-Jonsson, 2014). I find it logical to assume that this is due to a multifaceted nature of activism that played its part here; as a minority fighting for equity, feminists with a knack for activism were also involved in other fields. Protest may likely be organized by women because they are often on the margins of formal decision making (Buckingham, 2004). In this, I see no underlying essentialism, but it should not be forgotten that this sometimes spiritual approach can be a strong pointer toward unity.

Almost as a reply on ecofeminism, feminist political ecology emerged later on. It rejects 'ecofeminist myths' of women being inherently closer to the earth. Instead of relying on solidarity, it approaches political ecology from a post-structuralist feminist perspective (Joshi, 2016). Feminist political ecology studies the complexity of evolving social relations. It states that these are never free of gender inequities. While they also discuss the role of women in global environmental development, the focus lies on analysis and not on activism from an idea of inherent woman-nature connection. Rather this link is created through daily experience (Rocheleau, 1995). Feminist political ecology is also at the base more open to gender mainstreaming because it looks often at the rights of men as well as women (Elmhirst, 2011).

## Rethinking ecofeminism

Personally, I find that articles as well as personal accounts criticizing ecofeminism focus on the reinforcement of duality. Looking at essentialism especially, it amplifies feminine characteristics both in nature and people. Since essentialist ecofeminism refuses gender mainstreaming, it is often argued that this works even against equality (Dankelman, 2016). It is a logical assumption that ascribing feminine principles to nature reinforces a binary look at gender, instead of seeing it as a spectrum. Principles of masculinity that can just as well be found in women are rejected. Twine (2001)

calls this essentialist form cultural feminism, and also points out that this school is more concerned with issues connected to personal growth from a feminine essence. This gives women a specific feminine role that fits into society, and it risks speaking of gender complementarity: more dualism ensues.

However, when looking at the points of criticism that can be made about ecofeminism, it is a risk that one falls into his or her own form of dualistic thinking. In the same way, ecofeminism can be dualistic in different fields. This should be seen from an intersectional perspective. It is rather reasonably pointed out by critics that ecofeminism focuses on a deep connection with nature that is not necessarily present in any woman. Often this goes further into the analysis of Western and non-Western countries, or the Global North and South. Development is looked at, as well as what are seen as women's needs, issues or tasks in different societies. This duality is an inter-linked issue perceived in many ways, also by different (eco)feminists. Often a nature-culture divide is made that creates a chasm between what are considered developing and developed countries. Kabeer (1994) underlines this duality in development, and how women's issues are - rightfully - becoming gender issues. However, she points out, women still occupy a marginal place in policy. Like gender issues, the degradation of nature and natural resources is best not addressed as a North/South issue, but rather due to government (top-down); modern science and development. This is not always the case. I will outline some general ecofeminist ideas about these two categories of the world – while categorizing is a risk in itself – and how they are linked. In this context, it is also useful to broach the topic of what it means to be connected with nature. The West is often deemed disconnected, and following this theory with ecofeminism, women in developed societies might no longer be in a position to argue on behalf of nature. This is in my opinion, however, an idea relying heavily on constructed borders between the North and South, and it should not be forgotten that ecofeminism has plenty of roots in Western culture (Molyneux & Steinberg, 1995).

### The North/South debate

As pointed out throughout developmental studies, environmental degradation and more heavily the occurrence of natural disasters affect different groups of people unequally. Those who live without privileges such as access to resources, skill and opportunity are disadvantaged and are more deeply affected by natural disasters (Dankelman, 2016). This is due to diverse inequalities, especially socio-economic status; here gender inequity plays a significant role. This has been researched by the London School of Economics and Political Science, showing large-scale gender differences in mortality rates. The life expectancy of women is lowered more than that of men, and this is linked more with social norms and socio-economic status than biology and physiology (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007). We may assume that these effects exist more heavily in cultures where the difference in

access to resources and social order is stronger; linking it to the Global South. I think it can be addressed more globally, rejecting the North/South divide and acknowledge that poverty and inequity exist in any society. Neumayer and Plümper (2007) also found this causal relationship with the socio-economic status of women, leaving the link with nations open to interpretation. From an ecofeminist perspective, this puts women in a closer position to nature, giving them all to more right to argue on nature's behalf. However, and I will elaborate on this hereafter, being affected more deeply does not necessarily mean that one feels this connection to nature personally. It is also useful to look at what we consider nature. Ideas of nature/culture duality may risk to connect with Western ideology of natural cultures eventually having to develop (Sturgeon, 2009ab). This again excludes cultures labelled as the Global South.

Buckingham (2004) looks at early movements sprouting from ecofeminism and points out the dramatized link between women's lack of power and environmental damage. This strategy was deemed necessary in regions such as Himalayan India and Kenya, where women's lack of power sprouted respectively the Chipko and Green Belt movement. These were environmental protests demanding nature conservation. However, Buckingham also mentions the protests considering the Love Canal in New York State, a movement protesting toxics wastes buried in the neighbourhood. It is true that many cases we find in literature of ecofeminist action, or more generally the position of women as close to natural resources, focus on the Global South. We often look at small-scale agriculture and water management, for instance illustrated by case studies in South America (Bee, 2000; Vos, 2016). Another typical focus lies on the negative consequences of new technologies for women with limited access (Dankelman, 2016). This focus on the South could easily be explained by the low socio-economic status of women in these regions; it could also be linked to the attention given to developmental action, and moreover the way we categorize gender studies in privileged society. This creates a gap between the metropole and societies that are labelled as developing (Wekker, 2012).

### So who is connected?

It is a speculative exercise to analyse who is and is not connected to nature. We may pose that it all depends on one's position within a culture; favouring those who work with, or rather in, natural environment and are close to natural resources. Those who mention the distancing from nature by modern civilization could give a connected position to farmers, natural scientists and so on. However, this ignores that besides reliability, ecofeminism is about a deeper connection to nature that women have. One who lives with nature, does not necessarily appreciate it. This should exist in all layers of society.

If we reject the essentialist argument, which I am inclined to do, the connection comes from a shared experience of oppression. Those with privilege

and socio-economic advantage may feel this inequity less heavily: looking at those of higher class and a significant portion of Western society. Another, perhaps gender-bridging argument is the rapid modernization that may distance society and thus women as a whole from nature. For many people, this may be so, but it is also easily refuted looking at the dynamics of environmental activism. It may be a subgroup that focuses on it, environmentalism remains a hot issue within modernized culture.

Salleh (1984) draws valuable connections between ecofeminism and deep ecology: a movement arguing for a new ethic that recognises the intrinsic worth of nature. It rejects the man/nature dualism, which can be easily fitted with ecofeminism. And yet, Salleh argues, deep ecologists fail to recognize the primal source of this dualism: a patriarchal society. However stark this argument, it does bring forward the possibilities of linking deep ecology's egalitarianism with gender equity, reshaping the movement into something more inclusive.

### Conclusion

I think, to look at the core of the issue, that while it is entirely context-dependent, a reflexive form of ecofeminism can have its place in any society. Women's forms of disadvantage are ever changing, constructed in different ways depending on place and time, but they are a persistent factor relating to inequities made up by various characteristics. While rejecting the notion of a disconnected North and a closer-to-nature South, it does seem to me that globally, many of us need to reconnect with nature. This does not oppose the use of ecofeminism. Especially when looking at environmental activism, the role of gender can be beneficial. While reactions on ecofeminism such as feminist political ecology look more deeply into political structures, they are academic rather than vocal and activist. We have spoken of the necessity of activism before, and I think what ecofeminism can bring is the mobilization of a group. Essentialist or cultural ecofeminism (Twine, 2001) is productive in the sense that it sets feminists apart. This however dualizes gender in an unshakeable way, but for the time being it has been beneficial in uniting a group. To me, there is more to say for constructivist ecofeminism. It can frame women's interests within the interests of a society, making it more effective (Buckingham, 2004). Yet it still works as empowerment because it recognises women's oppression within a construct that also damages nature. This connection, however fluid and reinterpretable, could still be valid and more importantly: useful.

I would recommend that ecofeminism is continuously reshaped, and specifically recalls the rejection of gender mainstreaming. Gender should eventually be looked at as spectral and fluid, and one should always be cautious of dualism; be it man/woman, North/South or nature/culture. However, while we work on equity, the power behind social cohesion might for now be the stronger incentive. The goal remains to include women's perspective in environmental action. Ecofeminist theory can be a strong base of activism,

making it all the more productive. When formalized structures of participation are lacking, emerging environmental - and in this case ecofeminist - activism could be committed enough to redefine foundational principles that are damaging women, nature, or both.

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# WHY GENDER MATTERS FOR NATURE CONSERVATIONISTS

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## Introduction

When you think about nature conservation, your first associations might be National Parks, activism to save the Arctic, or the protection of threatened species. Even when you dwell upon the conservation and management of nature for a longer time, the issue of gender will probably not come to your mind. Different roles of men and women in society seem to have simply no relation at all to the protection of the world's ecosystems. However, the opposite might be true. In this essay I will defend the thesis that gender does matter for nature conservationists, and that it does so on different levels and in different ways.

## Environmentalism and feminism: A shared history

In order to understand the importance of gender for nature conservationists, it might be useful to travel back in time and see how things started. During the first half of the 20th century, the conservation movement emerged in Europe, focusing on the protection of wildlife, nature areas and natural resources. In the Netherlands, the Naardermeer became the country's first nature reserve in 1905 (Van der Meulen, 2009). In the 1960s, local environmental protests gave rise to a grassroots environmentalist movement in Western countries. Over time, the pattern was recognised that local environmental threats (e.g. pollution, toxic waste, oil spills, and nuclear waste) were caused by global structures and institutions (Shiva, 1993). This led to a greater awareness of global environmental problems (Carter, 2001), which was further fuelled by some influential writings that appeared in the same period (e.g. *Silent Spring* in 1962; *Limits to Growth* in 1972). Buckingham (2004) argues that women were at the forefront of these political protests because they were marginalised in formal decision-making.

The role of women in protests against environmental damage was further elaborated upon in the activist and academic movement of ecofeminism. The environmentalist social movement as a whole was a diverse assemblage of participatory pressure groups, public interest lobbies, and protest organisations who used both conventional and disruptive measures to put the environment onto the political agenda (Carter, 2001). Unlike in the conservationist movement, political and social issues played an important role in the environmentalist movement. This can be seen in the schools of thought of environmental justice and Global South environmentalism, but also in that of ecofeminism (Sturgeon, 2009).

Within ecofeminism, the relevance of gender in practices and policies related to the environment is argued for in different fashions. First of all, a specific link between women and nature/environment is assumed and can be conceptualised in two different ways: 1) an essentialist connection between women and nature (i.e. women can bear children and are therefore closer to nature), or 2) a social-constructivist argument (i.e. women share with nature the experience of being oppressed by social/economic structures) (Buckingham, 2004). Although this women-nature relation might seem a bit abstract and sought-after at first, it might actually hold some truth. For example, from a meta-analysis of five quantitative studies (Tam, 2013), it was found that female respondents showed a significantly higher dispositional empathy with nature than male respondents. Another meta-study (Zelezny, Chua & Aldrich, 2000) found that women report stronger environmental attitudes and pro-environmental behaviours than men. Both findings were explained by a stronger socialisation of women towards taking care of others and being socially responsible. So, this first dimension of feminist theories focuses on engaging women in projects and policies in the field of development and environment because they can speak on behalf of nature and play an important role in nature management (Arora-Jonsson, 2014).

Secondly, gender has been used as “an analytic category to probe how power relations organise all systems and interventions and how gender relations are implicit in environmental outcomes” (Arora-Jonsson, 2014). Gender is then about the ideological construction of masculinities which shape structural power relations, and about the environmental outcomes of these processes. Environmental protection and nature conservation might seem to be about the biophysical world only, but according to Sturgeon (2009), issues of environmental degradation are strongly interrelated with issues of social justice and can therefore not be solved in isolation. Attention for the role of gender in projects related to development and environment has led to gender mainstreaming in projects and policies from the 1990s onwards. Thus, “although mostly on the margins of environmental policy and development from the 1970s onwards, gender has nonetheless become institutionalised in the field of environmental studies and policy” (Arora-Jonsson, 2014). There is a lot more to be said about the entanglement between feminist and environmentalist discourses, but I will limit myself to outlining some concrete entry points

to understand the relevance of gender for nature conservation in the next paragraphs.

## Feminist theory and the root causes of biodiversity decline

Professionals engaged in nature conservation are mostly dealing with the management of nature reserves, the ecological restoration of degraded areas, the protection of Red List species and communication with the public, governments and visitors about these duties. However, it might also be interesting for them to understand why biodiversity at large has become so highly threatened in the first place. Feminist theories can offer some interesting insights in this regard.

As mentioned above, the role of global structures and institutions in causing (local) environmental damage was already recognised during the emergence of the environmentalist movement. However, the consultation of a textbook about environmental policy (Carter, 2001) teaches us that the relation between globalisation and environmental degradation is still very much under debate. According to market liberals, globalisation and free trade are beneficial to the environment as an increased global wealth will lead to the development of cleaner technologies and will decouple economic growth and pollution. The ones in the field of environmental politics refute this by pointing to overconsumption, increasing transport distances, and thus increasing pollution as a result of the globalisation of free markets in which environmental costs are not included in the financial costs of production and consumption (Carter, 2001).

Feminist (political) ecologist theories can add an extra dimension to this debate, most importantly by unveiling the power structures underlying globalisation and free trade. Environmental degradation and associated biodiversity loss cannot be seen as isolated phenomena, but are (at least partly) caused by the very structure of our capitalist, consumerist society. For example, the globalisation of agriculture and related trade has led to the growth of agro-export at the expense of small-scale subsistence agriculture in the Global South, which had detrimental social and ecological effects (Joshi, 2015). So, in order to understand the root causes of biodiversity loss, we should analyse the power structures at play in these processes. In doing so, we should not only focus on the material performance and effects of our societal structures, but also on the narratives that are constantly reproduced and are becoming natural to us (Sturgeon, 2009; Sato, 2016). What collective biases do we have that are related to consumption, development or the natural environment? How is the relation between humans and nature constructed in popular culture? And in whose interest is it to keep reconstructing these narratives? These are the kind of questions that feminist theories invite us to think about.

Secondly, feminist political ecology invites us to explore the hierarchies between men and women, between masculine and feminine ways of reasoning, between powerful and marginalised groups and between ratio and intuition at all scales, ranging from

individuals to value chains or global politics (Elmhirst, 2011). This might sound somewhat abstract for now, but I will outline some practical examples in the field of nature conservation practice and knowledge in the following two sections.

## Feminist theory and the practice of nature conservation

We often find it important to engage local communities in the establishment and management of nature conservation areas. The use of a top-down “fines and fences approach”, flowing from a strict preservationist discourse on nature conservation, is mostly viewed as illegitimate and ineffective nowadays – at least in populated areas (Siurua, 2006). According to Albrechts (2004), the growing interest in environmental issues and the re-emphasis on long-term thinking have led to a call for more strategic approaches to spatial planning in Europe. He outlines four working tracks for strategic spatial planning, which can be applied to planning in nature conservation as well: 1) long-term vision, 2) short-term actions, 3) contact with key stakeholders and 4) permanent empowerment of citizens. This clearly illustrates the point that nature conservation is not (or no longer) only about understanding ecological processes, but also about social embeddedness. In the context of the Global South, community-based conservation is explored, for example using the landscape approach to manage conflicts between conservation goals and other societal concerns. Within this approach, there is also great attention to stakeholder involvement, empowerment, and continual learning (Sayer et al., 2013).

So, participatory processes seem to become an inherent part of nature conservation. In the arena of participation, gender is a major variable to consider. In many cultural contexts, gender is an important factor in shaping people's identity. Culturally constructed gender roles relate to differences between women and men in knowledge, rights, activities, access to and control over resources, decision-making power in private and public spheres, societal norms, etc. (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2006). These gender roles do not only lead to inequalities within communities, but also influence the way in which outsiders understand the local situation; men might be more to the forefront in many contexts, and “women's work, women's resources (including complex assemblages of plant and animal species), and women's land use are often invisible to the technocratic lens of the forester, the agronomist, the economic planner, the land surveyor, the conservation biologist and the environmentalist” (Rochelleau, 1995). Women are not only invisible on a local scale, but are under-represented at all levels of the conservation process (Deda & Rubian, 2004; Sodhi et al., 2010). However, there are many good reasons to include women in conservation projects. Firstly, conservation measures might have a greater negative impact on women than on men. For example, women are often the primary users of natural areas and are therefore more strongly disadvantaged by strict regulations (Allendorf & Allendorf, 2013); they were found

to bear a disproportional burden of costs associated with human-wildlife conflicts in India (Ogra, 2008), and they can have more difficulties in some contexts to gain access to compensation mechanisms (Ogra & Badola, 2008). In addition to this, the inclusion of women can also improve conservation outcomes. For example, in 20 countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia, Westermann et al. (2005) found that solidarity, collaboration, conflict resolution and the capacity for self-sustaining collective action were higher in natural resource management groups in which women were represented. In the field of forest management, women's participation in forestry groups in Nepal and India was correlated with higher forest protection and rule compliance which led to better forest conditions (Agarwal, 2009). So, it does seem to make sense to engage otherwise invisible women into nature conservation.

While stressing that gender inequalities are never absent, feminist theories also warn us not to get stuck in men-women dichotomies, and point to people's complex and shifting identities (Harris, 2006) and to the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, class, caste and other aspects of social difference (Nightingale, 2011; Joshi, 2011). Maybe the most important thing to learn from feminist theories at this point is that inclusive participation in which everybody has an equal say may sound reasonably straight-forward, but will in many cases be complicated because of social inequalities. Even when a participatory approach is designed in which everybody formally has equal rights and responsibilities, this will not (automatically) lead to truly democratic outcomes when power differences exist between individuals or groups outside of the project context (Cleaver, 1999; Fraser, 1990). This is an issue that is becoming highly relevant for nature conservation as discourses shift towards community-based conservation and inclusive, participatory decision-making.

A second issue that feminist theories help us to question, is the actual rationale underlying participation. Although win-win-situations are often assumed (i.e. both nature and people benefit), participation in whatever project also brings along costs for participants. Although projects might use a rhetoric of empowerment, this is mostly not the real goal (Cleaver, 1999). According to Rocheleau (1995), the inclusion of women into conservation projects oftentimes results in using them as "volunteers and 'natural' allies to serve the interests of biodiversity preservation". One might rightfully question to what extent this is empowering or even fair. The challenge remains of how to get it right and how to fully ensure the interests of both nature and local people. The answer might partly lay in a better understanding of knowledge and professional cultures in the field of nature conservation and its relation to gender.

### Feminist theory, knowledge and professional cultures in nature conservation

Every profession has its own culture, norms and values and these are often gendered (Liebrand, 2016). The

forestry profession is strongly associated with masculinity in Sweden (Lidestav & Sjölander, 2007), Norway (Brandth & Haugen, 2000) and India (Hannam, 2000). Good foresters are for example associated with physical strength and endurance, interest in hunting and wildlife, adventure and independence, rationality and power – qualities which are stereotypically more connected to masculinity than to femininity. So, even when women foresters are not consciously discriminated against, the professional culture might hamper gender equality within the forestry profession. Furthermore, when participation becomes important in forest management, the masculine culture in forestry might obstruct the inclusion of the viewpoints of women. According to Shiva (in Hannam, 2000), this was the case in India where local women's traditional role in forest management was neglected by colonial scientific foresters.

Ivens (2016) argued that, in order to be able to promote gender equality in society, organisations should first make sure to achieve gender equality internally, with regard to both formal institutions and informal cultural norms. So, insofar as nature conservation organisations want to realise gender equality in their participation practices, a first prerequisite is that they realise gender equality within the organisation. This is a real challenge for organisations which have their roots in the masculine forestry tradition. More broadly, women were found to be generally under-represented at the managerial and decision-making levels of environmental and conservation organisations (Deda & Rubian, 2004; Taylor, 2015).

Apart from the issue of professional culture, feminist theories also invite us to critically analyse which knowledge is used in biodiversity conservation. The point is eloquently put into words by Rocheleau (1995): "To incorporate gender fully (...) is not to 'add women' but rather to redefine biodiversity in broader, more inclusive and even fluid terms. It implies a definition based on the diverse experiences and the distinct sciences of many different groups". Mainstream scientific practice is dominated by Western men, and according to feminist scholars, this matters for the way in which knowledge is produced (Haraway, 1991). Although the rhetoric of objectivity used to describe scientific knowledge is extremely powerful, humans can only understand the world through interpretation and this is always contextualised and situated. So, by building upon a scientific approach towards nature conservation, the knowledges of marginalised groups might be ignored, while they can be equally valuable. Even though some progress towards including different knowledges has been made in the practice of nature conservation, Arora-Jonsson (2014) argues that the current focus of environmental debates on global governance and technical aspects of climate change has pushed out the viewpoints and knowledges of ordinary people. A study amongst project heads of community-based wildlife conservation projects in India found that, despite a widespread support for integrating gender equity, many believe gender might be "a potentially distracting and secondary issue" (Ogra,

2012). I hope to have showed in this essay why gender can be relevant for nature conservation.

### Conclusion

Gender is relevant for nature conservationists for different reasons. First of all, environmentalism and feminism have a history that is partly shared. Secondly, critical feminist approaches can help to explain the underlying causes of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. Thirdly, an understanding of gender has become essential as nature conservation has moved towards participatory approaches. A better understanding of local women's relative invisibility, power differences in communities, the true rationale underlying participation processes and professional cultures and knowledge within nature conservation organisations can help to move towards equitable and effective conservation efforts.

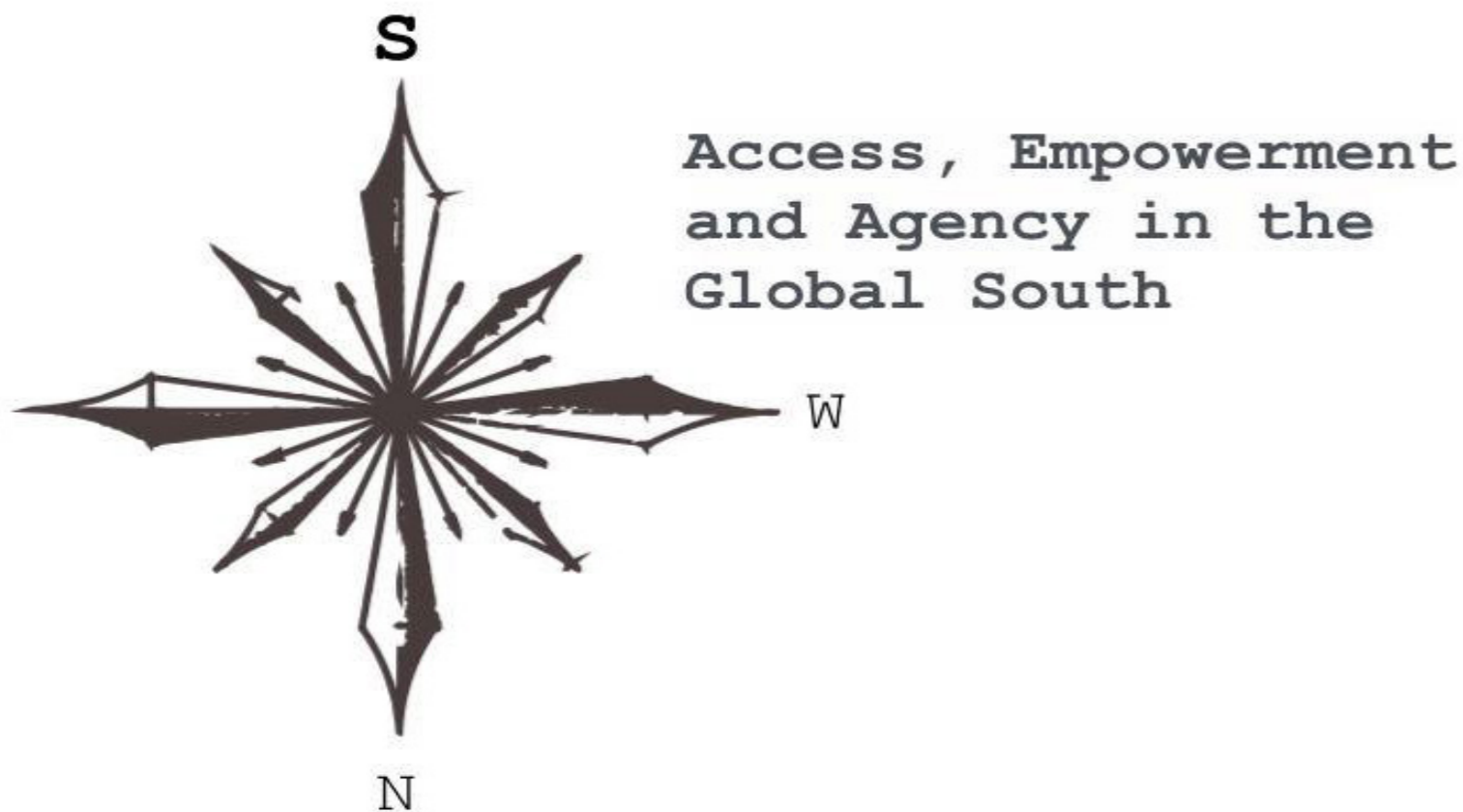
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# MICROFINANCE AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT: A BROAD VIEW ON THE EFFECT OF MICROFINANCE PROGRAMS ON WOMEN'S AGENCY

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## Introduction

All over the world people set up small businesses, they invest, they work and they expand. Not everyone has access to loans from the bank for this, because of various reasons. Especially people living below the poverty line are excluded from institutions like banks. They often live in rural areas without much land or property. Microfinance programs provide these people with collateral-free loans with low or no interest rates. These loans are meant to help people to break out of poverty (Sanyal 2009). The loans can be used for all different kind of purposes for example agricultural investments, fisheries, small local shops or tools and working places. Many of these microfinance programs focus on women. This is based on a common belief that empowering women is the best antipoverty measure. An important assumption is that women will invest their loans in improvement of the household welfare. This would not only benefit the household but the total economy of the region or country. It is believed that providing women with money alleviates poverty and empowers the participating women (Brau & Woller, 2004; Hunt & Kasynathan, 2001). This idea is called a "gender myth" by Batliwala et al. (2007). She describes how this general idea was successfully created by feminists to increase the access to economic resources for women.

Empowerment can be defined as the capacity to increase the influence on change and self-reliance, decision making right and the control over resources. Kabeer (1999) describes three interrelated dimensions of choice and empowerment; resources, agency and achievement. Agency is about the ability to make choices and act upon them. This can be operational and visible but agency can also reflect on cognitive processes like reflection and analysis (Moser, 1989; Kabeer, 1999). Because agency is one of the three dimensions, it can be assumed that increasing agency contributes to empowerment. When studying empowerment and mechanisms of empowerment looking at agency might be helpful and interesting. This brings me to the question; how do microfinance programs increase women's agency?

To answer this question I'll give a short overview of microfinance and some examples of microfinance programs that aim women empowerment. In the third section the examples will be analysed and discussed.

## Microfinance programs and their goals

As mentioned in the introduction microfinance pro-

grams are meant for people who don't have access to the formal banking system. The scale of the programs can vary from a couple of people to very large scale international programs serving millions of people. All programs serve in principle the same goal; help people out of poverty (Morduch, 1999). Two goals can be distinguished in most of the programs. (1) Increase of household welfare on the short term. And (2) economic growth and increasing incomes on the long term (Kevane & Wydick, 2001). The approach and target group however can be different among programs. The programs focussing on women often have a third goal, empowerment of women.

Within the microfinance programs two categories can be distinguished. Firstly, there is individual microfinance which is an agreement with one person and the second category is group-based microfinance. Group-based programs offer loans to groups of people working together and co-sign the agreements (Sanyal, 2009; Morduch, 1999). Next to the financial programs, organisations can offer additional services like trainings and facilitation of group processes but also saving and insurance services. These services, if performed properly, have a positive influence of the effect of the microfinance program (Sanyal, 2009; Brau & Woller, 2004).

Next to the financial and economic effects of microfinance, literature covers the so-called unintended effects or unintended social benefits. These effects are not directly related to money but indirectly benefit or improvement because of the growing welfare from the program (Sanyal, 2009).

## Agency

Agency is the ability to make choices and act upon that. Agency goes further than just choices and behaviour. It is about thoughts, the ability to analyse, the choices you make and whether to use agency or not use it. Agency often expresses itself within a system but can also challenge this system (Joshi, 2016). Sanyal (2009) distinguishes six capabilities of agency: "social awareness, social interaction, physical mobility, domestic power, civic participation, and ability to take part in collective action or public campaigns" (p. 535). Measuring women's agency is not easy and there is no clear framework for analysing agency. Kabeer (1999) analysed different literature about agency and measuring of agency. She found decision-making agency most frequently measured. To conceptualize decision-making it is important to see the difference in consequential significance of decisions and in the hi-

erarchy of decision-making powers. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that statistics simplify complex phenomenon's like decision-making. Simplifying can change the perception and means of the agency. Agency can be compared to previous situations or comparisons between people can be made. In the case of microfinance programs a logical measuring method is comparison of the agency before and after the programme was implemented. When measuring agency in relation to microfinance the personal living circumstances and gender relationships within the household should always be taken into account (Fofana et al., 2015).

### Women and microfinance in practice

Many studies have been done on empowerment of women by microfinance programs. Most of the research in India and Bangladesh but also at other places. The following examples illustrate the different outcomes of some of these studies. The first example is about the control over finances and the loans. Goetz and Gupta (1996) made an index of loan control, from no involvement to full control, evaluating projects in Bangladesh. It turned out that about 63 percent of the women had only partly or limited control. In these cases men were usually head of the household and the loans were used for men's productive activity. The research was not going into women's empowerment or agency. But the fact that they don't have control over the credit does not suggest empowerment.

Another study, in India, showed different results. Women participating in microfinance programs, so called self-help groups, were compared to women who were not participating. The women in the self-help group were empowered in a couple of ways. They increased resistance to existing gender norms and developed the ability to make independent choices. The study also showed that not all women were empowered to the same level and that personal development was an important factor. One of the other conclusions was that only financial services were not enough, additional services like education and awareness training are important for the empowerment process (Bali Swain & Wallentin, 2009).

The third example focusses on group-based microfinance. Groups of women in West Bengal who collectively got a loan. The NGO responsible for the program facilitated the group formation and group interaction-processes. These programs led to an increase of social capital, collective action and social benefits. The collective action increased within the group but also externally to women who did not participate in the program. The women were taken out of the isolation of their households, which had a major impact on their lives. Their social awareness increased and the groups developed collective empowerment. One of the social benefits of the collective empowerment was that the women gained individual agency (Sanyal, 2009).

Fofana and colleagues (2015) studied a microfinance project for women in Cote d'Ivoire. An area which is characterized by low productivity and lack

of resources. They focussed mainly on decision-making power, gendered intra-household relationships and wealth. These aspects were compared between participants of the program and non-participants. The study showed that women who participated gained decision-making power on practical and strategic gender needs. This empowerment led to the ability to make financial decision without interference of their husbands. The women invested their earned money mostly in wealth of the family which resulted in a stronger bargaining position within the household. The authors see this development as a sign of transformative agency.

### Analysis

As mentioned in the introduction, agency and empowerment are not the same. Although agency is a part of empowerment most of the gender/microfinance literature focusses on empowerment of women without analysing agency separately. The first example from Goetz and Gupta (1996) spoke of the control over a loan. This could be seen as the resource dimension of empowerment. The other examples focussed mostly on the decision making power of women in the programs. Decision making power is used as an indicator of empowerment in these studies. When taking into account the three dimensions of Kabeer (1999) empowerment includes more than decision-making only, the different dimensions (resources, agency and achievement) are not clearly studied by these authors. I believe it is possible to see the decision-making power in the context of agency. Agency partly deals with the ability to make decisions. Measuring this ability indicates women's agency according to Kabeer (1999). The examples showed that in most of the cases the decision making power of the women increased from the microfinance programs. Translating this conclusion to the three dimensions of empowerment, I would argue that this increase of decision-making power does not necessarily means empowerment, but means increase of (decision-)agency. The decision-making power does not automatically reflect the other two dimensions, resources and outcome.

Two of the examples did mention agency. Although the approaches of the programs were different they both resulted into women's empowerment. They both speak of the social benefits of collective empowerment of the women but also increasing individual agency. The women in Sanyal's (2009) study gain individual agency. She shows the importance of social awareness and knowledge about rights and resources. The agency increased because of the social interaction within the group and new contacts because of the group-based microfinance program. The example of Fofana and colleagues (2015) also show increasing agency for the women who participate. The empowerment of the women led to a stronger bargaining position in the household, she calls it transformative agency. Both of the programs provided additional services, like trainings, which had a positive effect on the empowerment of the women.

The methods of measuring agency, as de-

scribed in the third section, can be recognized in the examples when making the translation from empowerment to agency. Goetz and Gupta (1996) made the statistical simplification by categorizing and visualizing with figures. The other examples have either used the comparison with the previous situation or a comparison with a control group. This section also mentioned the importance of cultural context and gender relations. Culture, norms and values can strongly influence agency. When speaking of the significance of decisions, it is important to consider these influences. The six capabilities of Sanyal (2009) can also be recognized in the studies. As mentioned earlier, the social awareness resulting from group processes in Sanyal's (2009) study but also social interaction and collective action. The improving bargaining position in the study of Fofana and colleagues (2015) could be seen as domestic power. The increasing resistance against gender roles in India (Bali Swain & Wallentin, 2009) is another example of domestic power and social awareness. This study also showed how not all women were empowered to the same level. But as pointed out earlier, individual environment and households influence agency. Therefore, agency can improve the position of an individual, and influence another's life differently.

### Discussion and conclusion

This paper is a very broad overview of the literature about microfinance and women empowerment and agency. Although the studies are performed in different places on different continents and with different ethnic groups and cultures, they show some similarities. The individual effect of the programs on the women varies, but most of them do result in empowerment. My study was not about empowerment by microfinance programs. Therefore, I cannot conclude that microfinance programs are in general empowering for women. The examples in this paper do indicate a positive influence but also show some downsides, like the low percentage of women who have full control over their loans. As mentioned in the introductions Batliwala and colleagues (2007) call the idea of providing women with microfinance to overall empowerment of women and for alleviation of poverty a myth. The loans would preoccupy the women with earning money to repay. This negatively influences their ability to participate in public affairs and worked against empowerment. None of the examples I found gave this impression. This contradiction is interesting and might need more research. The idea that microfinance for women is a myth is not confirmed by the other authors either. On the individual basis most of the studies indicated empowerment.

Agency is much less researched than empowerment but it is possible to translate the empowerment studies to agency when looking at decision-making power. Although it does not cover agency and all of its aspects entirely, it does give an implication. The comparison between the studies also shows that the environment and culture play an important role in the process of agency improvement. Some studies only saw an increase of decision-making power and other

studies spoke of social benefits, stronger positions of women within the households and collective power. I also believe that no empowerment does not automatically mean that there is no agency. Agency is more than acting, as mentioned earlier, cognitive processes can also be agency. Research specifically on agency or more systematic approach of translating empowerment to agency is needed to gain more knowledge about the connection between agency and microfinance.

Secondly, the role of additional services in the programs for improving agency is not clear from these cases. Some of the authors emphasize the importance of these services. Sanyal (2009) spoke of the positive value of these services by facilitating group processes. Research is needed on the role and influence of additional services on agency and empowerment of women.

To conclude: microfinance programs can have a positive effect on women's agency. But it depends on the approach of the program and the additional services they offer. Microfinance seems to increase decision-making agency the most but also influences other aspects of agency. From these results I would argue that the group-based microfinance programs are more effective on increasing agency than individual programs because it enhances social awareness and collective power.

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# GENDER AND WATER PRIVATIZATION

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## Introduction

The neoliberal strain of thought aims to reduce government spending in order to enhance the role of the private sector in the economy (Ahlers, 2005). It is for this reason that the World Bank stimulates privatization and free trade so that agricultural multinationals could invest in developing countries and export their products on the global market. In 1990, the World Bank presented the concept of water privatization as a solution to the water problem in cities in the global south. The privatization of water was expected to bring greater efficiency and lower prices. Next to that, it was expected to expand water and sanitation services to the unconnected poor (Spronk, 2009). Bennett and colleagues (2005) distinguish between privatization and commercialization when defining the concept of privatization. According to the authors, privatization is to assign private ownership to the (water) resource. Due to this privatization, the management of the resource is no longer exclusively the responsibility of the public sector. Commercialization implicates introducing an economic institution into the water sector. This economic institution will guide distribution, increase efficiency, and create a (water) market. So the difference is that in privatization, the access to the resource is privatized, while formally it is still a public good, and in commercialization citizens need to pay for the services of the economic institution (e.g. distri-

bution of the water) and/or it enables people to trade (water) rights.

The initial introduction of privatization resulted into amongst others unaffordable water rates and lost jobs. Since these issues appeared due to insufficient attention to the needs of disadvantaged users, the World Bank adopted a focus on “pro-poor” privatization. The pro-poor approach differs from the original since it encourages the participation of the poor, which are seen as the central “stakeholders” in the process of service delivery (Spronk, 2009). As will be further elaborated upon below, women are often the most disadvantaged users with a high labour burden. Therefore this essay aims to provide a better understanding of gender in water privatization. In the following chapter, I will explain the gendered effects of water privatization and commercialization and support this with cases from Latin America. I conclude with a summary that argues that privatization and commercialization are not suited for promoting gender equality.

## Gender equality in water privatization

Before analysing gender equality in water privatization issues, there is a need to define the concept of gender equality. The definition of gender equality refers to “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Gender equality

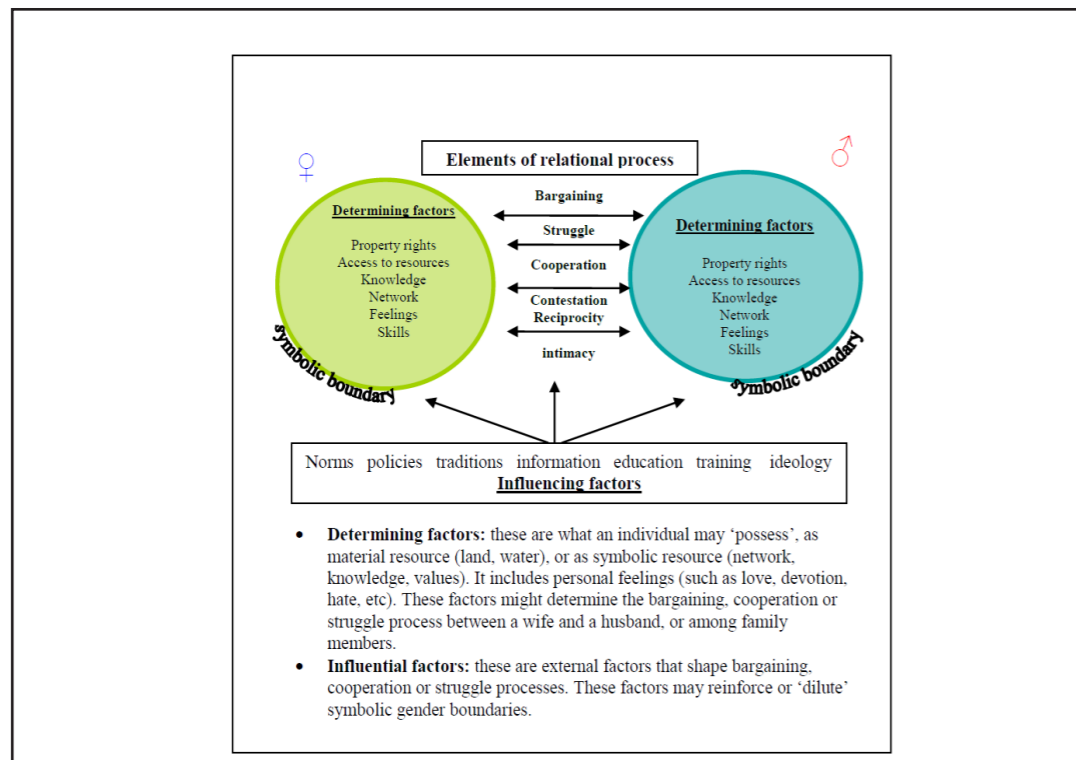


Figure 1: Gender Relations (Vera Delgado, 2015)

implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration,

recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women” (UN 2016)

These equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities between men and women depend on the gender relations within the community. These relations are clearly illustrated by Vera Delgado (2015) in figure 1. The figure illustrates that both the determining factors, such as property rights and access to resource, and influencing factors, such as traditions and norms and values, play an important role in the gender relations within the community.

## Privatization

The idea of pro-poor privatization is to enable the poor to have the formal right to an amount of water (Laurie and Crespo, 2007). If one possesses this right, it is argued that one will be included in decision making, for example by becoming a member of a Water Users Association. This ability to influence decision making will empower the poor. However, the land rights are often assigned to men through formal concessions or through the patrilocal system/community membership (Ahlers, 2005). The Bolivian agrarian reforms of 1953, for instance, distributed only 17 percent of land titles to women (Deere & León, 2001). In general, men are seen as the head of the household and are therefore granted with the formal land or water rights which also gives them the decision making power over these resources (Ahlers & Zwarteveen, 2009). Examples of households in the Andes of Peru show that women have different strategies and forms of agency to have a say in the decision making, which are also illustrated in figure 1. One woman (Nina), for example, had to take over all the agricultural tasks of her husband because he was the

president of the Water Users Association. Since she was doing all the agricultural tasks, she gained much knowledge about agriculture and their fields. This gained knowledge plus her bargaining skills resulted that her husband is now asking for her opinion when he goes to the WUA meeting and asks her to join whenever he needs to travel for a meeting (Vera, n.d.)

A (liberal) feminist strategy to ‘solve’ this privatization issue is to focus on ‘equalizing’ and ‘including’ women, which is achieved by removing educational and legal barriers (Ahlers & Zwarteveen, 2006). This is the formal approach of attempting to accomplish gender equality (see figure 2). The inclusion or integration of women in formal decision-making bodies and markets is an important precondition for development and women’s empowerment. However, these ‘equalizing’ measures overlook and ignore the social, cultural and historical dimensions of gendered inequities. As is shown in both figure 1 and 2, in case of female held titles, it does not necessarily mean that women will be added to the Water Users Association. Even when the male members are informed about gender equality principles, there is still gender inequality in the internal culture and deep structure of the society which influences the perception on men/women and their tasks and responsibilities. The provision of information about gender equality might increase one’s awareness but will not necessarily change women’s and men’s consciousness, let alone change the internal culture and deep structure within the society (Gender at Work, n.d.).

An example is the household of Leo and Lupe in the Andes of Peru. In this household, Lupe (female) is struggling to receive the land and water rights she deserves. Leo is an alcoholic and mistreats his wife, while Lupe is responsible for all the agricultural and water activities. Lupe’s situation is known in the community, but the men in the community blame the

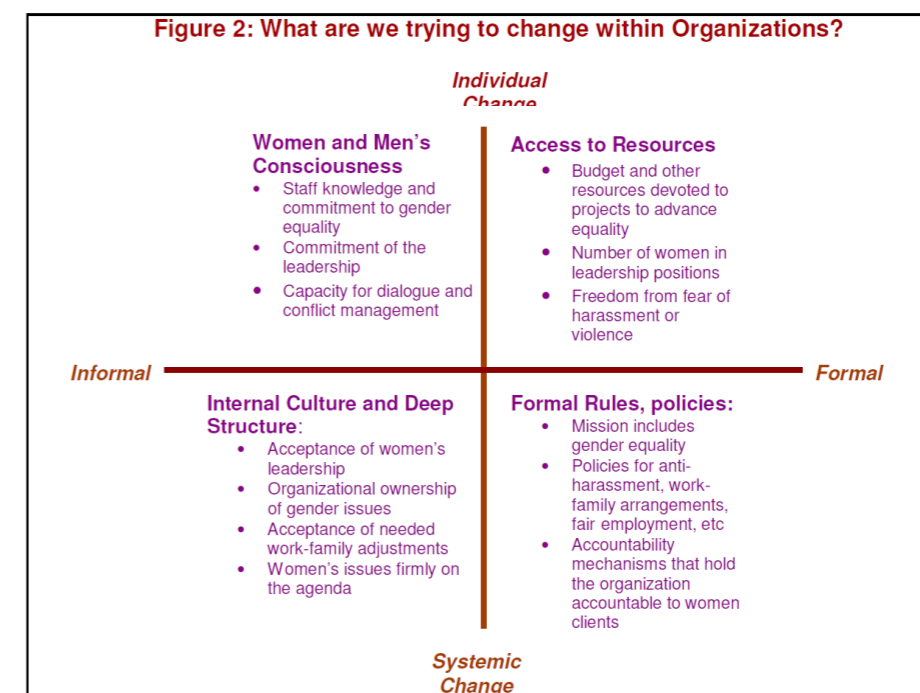


Figure 2: Gender equality development programming (Gender at work)

mistreatment on Lupe saying that she should not confront her husband so much with his alcoholism and just accept it. After a long period of struggling she acquired the rights she wanted, but most water users still refer to her as a negative example for other women. They call her machista to indicate that she is not behaving as is expected of a 'proper' women and that she is intruding symbolic and normative gender boundaries (Vera, n.d.). Also Liebrand (2016) states that women labour is often valued less than male labour. Even in countries such as the Netherlands, which we consider more developed and more gender equal than countries in the global south, there is a difference in the value of female labour compared to male labour. Liebrand (2016) gives the example of the high status of doctors, but now, as soon as more female students become interested in this profession, the status of the profession declines. Liebrand (2016) also indicates that that is the reason why engineers have such a high status, since it is mainly a male profession. So there is still an underlying cultural belief that male qualities are somehow more appropriate or "better" and that these qualities are needed to, for example, become a member of the WUA. This indicates that, in order to improve gender equity in water management, one does not only need to address the formal barriers but also the informal barriers that women face in access to water (see figure 2).

Water privatization and commercialization can also lead to a situation where water rights are sold by the marginalized and bought by the wealthy in the private sector, as was the case in Mexico and Peru. Men and women both sold rights but men were the only who bought them. Next to that, selling rights was highly gendered in payment (Brennet, 2005). An example in Peru, where large agricultural companies buy land with water rights from smallholder farmers to produce products on the world market. These smallholder farmers do not sell the land- and water- rights voluntarily but are often indebted by the government due to a failed harvest or investments in pesticides. These smallholders do not see another way to pay off the debts and are therefore forced to sell their land to the company (Vos et al., 2014). As Bennett and colleagues (2005) state: "the economic and politically wealthy embrace market solutions because, by monetarily valuing nature, purchasing power will decide its reallocation".

But the major problem that companies face in water privatization, is: how to make money from the poor. The poor do not have the money to pay for the construction costs and their consumption level is so low that it will not give returns on the company's investment. In the case of Bolivia, the company's strategy to reduce cost in order to make its investments profitable was to let the poor voluntarily participate in maintenance (Laurie & Crespo, 2007). The ability to mobilize enough labour becomes important to farming success of the household. Again in this case, the gendered value of the labour will decide if it becomes a burden for the women. In case of male employment, men have the water rights and therefore become a member of

the WUA. In this case, women will only have decision making power through the agency she has within the household (Vera, n.d.). In case of female employment, the free labour that the woman needs to provide becomes a burden since she has to take care of her other care- and agricultural responsibilities as well.

According to Joshi (2011), the local constructs of manliness are violated when an adult men assist their wives in the household activities. This is a result of the masculine burden to be the breadwinner (Joshi, 2011; Janwillem, 2016). So the few men who assist their wives with work at home have already fulfilled this burden since they are usually those in paid employment. However, when a man is unemployed, his anger of not fulfilling the masculine burden of being the breadwinner reflects in dominance and violates over his wife. As he said: "Am I so much less a man that I should now help my wife with the housework?" (Joshi, 2011). The issue is therefore not only the value and perception on female rights, responsibilities and opportunities, but also the stereotype that men have to dominate and be breadwinners.

### Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn is that although privatization may be pro-poor and strive towards poverty reduction, it reinforces gender inequalities. The case studies about water privatization reveal shortcomings in benefits for the poor and mainly women (Ahlers, 2005; Joshi, 2011; Ahlers & Zwartveen, 2009; Bossenbroek & Zwartveen, 2014). Privatization in essence is a way of tackling gender equality in a formal approach. However, what is learned from these cases is that privatization does not necessarily lead to women empowerment nor does it increase the value of female labour (Liebrand, 2016).

The reason behind these inequalities between men and women is the internal culture and structure within a society. The introduction of property rights might present opportunities for women to have formal access to the water resources, however, these rights are embedded in structural gender inequality which can be reproduced by commercialization. In the case of Peru and Mexico, the alienable rights did not provide any empowerment for women but rather contributed to rural poverty due to the encouragement to trade their rights in a gendered market (Bennett et al., 2005).

Since gendered inequalities (in amongst others labour divisions or inheritance structures) are supported by the internal culture and deep structure of the society, development programs that aim for gender equality should not just attempt to 'equalize' the formal rights but need to see, as Ahlers and Zwartveen (2006) state 'beyond women' and aim for the internal culture and deep structure that influence these gendered divisions. The neo-liberal approach of privatization and commercialization in the water sector is not suitable for this challenge since companies need to make profits and the poor women, with their lack of money and low consumption rate, are a risky investment. These struggles of gendered divisions are

however still an issue in the 'developed' world and the question then becomes whether it is ethical and realistic to force 'our' way of thought of feminism in the development programming for countries in the global south.

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# GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS IN NEPAL

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Bachelor Land and Water Management

## Introduction

In Nepal only 11 percent of the women own land. This includes women who own the land themselves as well as those who share the ownership with another household member. Over 80 percent of the Nepali households depend on agriculture so arable land is an important resource. This is especially true for women, since over 90 percent of women workers are agricultural labourers or land managers, while for male workers this is 64 percent (Allendorf, 2007). Land rights can be defined in several ways, but in this essay land right is defined as the formal ownership of it. As the owner of land, farmers can make their own decisions on how and when to use it and they can use the land as collateral for getting a loan. Although women are often responsible for the work on the land while men migrate to the cities to find wage labour, it is not common for women to have land rights (Allendorf, 2007). This unequal division of land rights is rooted in the patriarchal inheritance system Nepal had in the past, which is still largely active (Basnet, 2012). This is one of the many ways of how gender inequalities are embedded in the culture. Worldwide certain gender biases can be found in for example policy, property rights and unequal bargaining power within households creating inequalities between men and women (Bulbeck, 2001).

Currently, these kind of gender inequalities are acknowledged more often and many projects try to establish more equal gender relations by for instance gender mainstreaming. Providing land rights to women is often seen as a tool to promote development and increase gender equality, increasing economic efficiency and productivity by empowering women (Allendorf, 2007; Agarwal, 1994).

To investigate whether land rights really lead to gender equality the main question of this essay will be: To what extent does allocating land rights to women lead to gender equality in Nepal?

To answer this question, first the concepts of gender, gender equality and women empowerment will be explained, then the current land rights for women in Nepal are described and finally the effects of land rights for women are in Nepal are analysed to find out whether land rights for women really lead to gender equality.

## Gender, gender equality and women empowerment

To be able to say whether assigning land rights to

women will lead to gender equality it is important to define what is meant by gender and gender equality. Women empowerment is also a term which is often used in development projects to explain the path to gender equality. All these terms are quite complex and tend to have different interpretations, so they will first be defined.

Gender is often understood as the difference between men and women, but the actual concept goes far beyond the biological differences of men and women. It includes the socially constructed expectations and role stereotypes linked to these sexes. Masculinities are valued higher than femininities and this can be seen in all layers of society (Bulbeck, 2001; Liebrand, 2016). In my opinion it is good to acknowledge that men and women are different and gender equality doesn't mean that women and men should be exactly the same. Gender equality is a very complex concept that can be defined in many ways. In this essay it will be defined as treating both sexes equally with respect to their differences by giving men and women the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, while equally valuing and favouring the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men (CIIE, 2016; Bulbeck, 2001). Women empowerment refers to increasing women's agency, their capability in making choices on their lives and their environments (Malhotra and Schuler, 2005; Allendorf, 2007). This is seen as a way to try to achieve gender equality by creating more equal opportunities for men and women.

## Current land rights for women in Nepal

Nepal has a tradition of patrilineal inheritance. In the first codified land law of 1854 women were not allowed to own land, since these laws were based on traditional Hindu scriptures, Manusmriti, which state that 'a wife, a daughter and slave will not get any property. The property they acquire belongs to the man to whom they belong' (Basnet, 2012). Since the establishment of the democratic kingdom of Nepal in 1990, women's rights to inherent land got increased because Nepal was pushed by the United Nations. But in practice women still face many challenges, because of the prevailing traditional customs and beliefs (Basnet, 2012; Allendorf, 2007). This essay will not go into the details of the inheritance laws of Nepal, but is it important to realize how deep these religious values are embedded in all layers of society.

Among many women and men there is a lack

of awareness on gender inequality. Women often lack information, confidence, experience and resources to really have access and control over the land that is officially entitled to them. Although land rights for women are introduced as a way of women empowerment, in Nepal as well as many other countries, in practice land is often automatically transferred to the male members of a family (Basnet, 2012). Thus, for a long time legal ownership was not allowed, and now it is, but informal rules and regulations are still largely active.

## Analyses of the effects of women's land rights in Nepal

So the question remains: what will be the effect of allocating land rights to women? Many scholars argue that property rights are crucial for poor and illiterate women to be empowered and to work towards gender equality, since women with land rights are more likely to have more decision-making power. This is also shown by a study in the paper of Allendorf (2007), which shows that 70 percent of women who own land have made at least one decision on their own, compared to 48 percent in other households. Indeed, in the households where women have land rights they are also found to have more decision-making power. Furthermore, land can be kept as collateral for loans and credit to be used for investments like equipment or education. This might lead to higher profits and economic growth, which is helpful for the development of the country (Basnet, 2012). There is also evidence suggesting that if women are in control of financial resources, they tend to invest more in their children to give them a better livelihood and life opportunities than men do (Allendorf, 2007).

Although land rights have potential to empower women and work towards gender equality, there are also some difficulties. Firstly, the population growth in Nepal increases the general pressure on land, resulting in fragmentation of land. Together with the resistance to women's inheritance as explained in the previous chapter, this makes it hard to really establish women's land rights. If more women get land titles, men need to lose land, which makes it a fundamental obstacle, since the powerful positions are dominated by men and they will not let this happen (Allendorf, 2007).

Another point of attention is the fact that when women have official land titles this doesn't automatically mean that they also have control over the land they own. In practice there is often a co-existence of several forms of rights from multiple levels of society, such as the state, customary, religious and local laws, which all have their own set of rules and regulations to define property. This is called legal pluralism (Meinzen-Dick & Pradhan, 2002). During negotiations claims can be justified by making use of the preferable set of rules which are supporting their claim, a process which is known as forum shopping. Which law will be accepted largely depends on other power relations (von Benda-Beckmann, 1984; Meinzen-Dick & Pradhan, 2002). In practice this means that high caste men most probably have the most influence since

they tend to have the most decision-making power. This legal pluralism makes it difficult for women to really get empowered, since having the official rights doesn't necessarily mean to have control over the land you own. To be able to change the structure of gender inequality, it will be necessary to start to look at bottom-up changes instead of starting to provide land rights by state law (Meinzen-Dick & Pradhan, 2002). By beginning to look into people's experiences with access and control, it might be possible to find out which laws, rules and norms have the most influence and why.

From these social and power structures it can be deduced that the Nepali society is largely based on masculine thinking, as is the case in most countries. Another example of these structures is that extension services assume that women cannot be farmers and therefore do not want to provide information or technology to women, because technology and irrigation are for men (Allendorf, 2007). To be able to really change gender equality I think you should go into these masculine structures and change the way people think about their roles in society, both men and women. By creating awareness of how masculine-thinking and gender inequalities are embedded in their local practices, policies and customary laws, there might be a way to get into the deeper structures of gender inequality to really make a difference.

Land rights are not the only factor which plays a role in women empowerment. In the study described by Allendorf (2007) it is found that receiving payment (wage or goods) increases the chance that women have the final decision-making power by 42 percent. Primary education increases this chance by 41 percent and secondary education by 82 percent. However the most important thing influencing the chance of being empowered as a woman is her place in the family structure. If the woman is the wife of the head of the household, her chances to be empowered are four times larger than for example those of the daughter-in-law or sister-in-law (Allendorf, 2007).

Lastly it is important to note that not all women or all men are the same. The role a person has in the Nepali society cannot be generalized this way, because this role is highly influenced by what caste, class, ethnicity and religion somebody is from. This intersectionality highly influences the effects that can be reached by providing land rights. For one woman, a combination of factors, such as her gender, but also caste and class, might mean that she gets empowered and that with her new agency her opportunities will become more equal to those of men in the same position, but for others this might be not the case since they are still oppressed by other factors. This intersectionality might mean that for instance high caste women are valued higher than low caste men (Geiser, 2005; Joshi, 2011). So when these high caste women get more land rights at the expense of the poor low caste men, do you then reach your goal? Some women might appear to be more empowered, but this doesn't change the deeper structure of gender inequality. It shows that the appearance of women empowerment, or increased agency for a certain group of women

doesn't necessarily mean a change in the deeper lying structure of gender inequality. To really change gender inequality, one should look into the deeper structures and include both women and men, and not only focus on empowering women and give attention to the actual personal identity of the people, which is a very complex process (Geiser, 2005).

### Conclusion

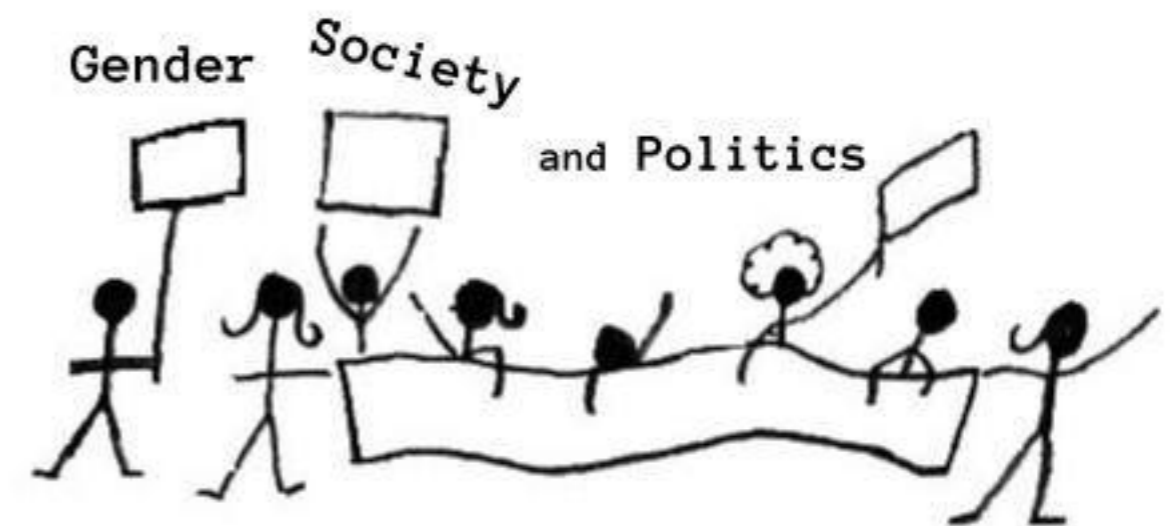
Since land rights are often seen as a development tool to reach gender equality the question was raised to what extent this is actually true for Nepal. Nepal has a very strong masculine society with patrilineal inheritance rules which are also connected to religion. During the last few decades, more women managed to become landowner. Positive effects of becoming land owner are that women often get more decision-making power within the household and they are empowered to invest, since the land can be the collateral for loans. So we might be able to state that land rights for women have the potential to empower them. On the other hand, does this empowerment lead to gender equality? Gender inequality is much more deeply embedded in society than only this ownership inequality and women won't get the same opportunities to men through just getting land rights. There should be awareness and willingness to change the underlying structure of inequality to really make a difference in gender equality.

All in all, land rights might be part of a road to gender equality, but they are definitely not a tool in itself. Still it might be a necessary step in development together with awareness raising, empowering women to perform income-generating activities, and other important measures. Not only is women empowerment needed to reach gender equality, but both men and women should be included while being aware of intersectionality and people's personal identity to change the deeper lying structures of unequal power relations and possibilities.

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# ECOLOGY AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS: THE PATH OF FULL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN WITHIN THE POLITICAL DOMAIN

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## Introduction

The work developed by ecofeminism, feminist environmentalist and feminist political ecology all made a direct link between gender, environment issues and the development process. The intersection of objectives amongst ecofeminism and feminist political ecology invite us to think about the inclusion of gender inequalities as a challenging perspective to analyse power, justice and governance.

These scholars advocate for the inclusion of women in decision making posts in order to represent and introduce the interest and concerns of women in the political domain. The core idea of the inclusion of women in politics was the natural link women share with nature due to their collective characteristics. The representation of women in the political domain have led to the creation and introduction of activist programmes. The aim of these activists' programmes is to create a change in the current administrative structures of the natural resource management in developing countries. Women's natural link with the environment obscured particular concerns of poverty and social structures. The introduction of these programmes ran the risk of increasing women's work load without addressing whether they actually had the resources and the capacity to meet the new roles they have acquire.

Nevertheless, it is important to remark that the opinion expressed in this essay is positive regarding the claims of the ecofeminist and feminist political ecology. What I am questioning is to what extent the inclusion of women in decision making posts could go beyond inclusion and truly represent the interests and concerns of women in developing countries in the political domain.

## Conceptual frameworks

Environmental degradation and the depletion of the natural resources is an unavoidable and pressing reality. The gendered relation of ecology, economy and politics is no longer a peripheral concern of the social sciences and contemporary politics. Feminist environmental movements make the connection between gender division and environmental degradation, arguing for the inclusion of women in decision making processes. Ecofeminism and feminist political ecology have arisen in the past decades as the two predominant frameworks for analysing the connection between gender and environment issues. In order to

understand how these frameworks become the platform for women inclusion in the political domain I will describe how they developed historically.

According to several authors (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014; Buckingham, 2004; Leach, 2007) during the 1980s there was a rise of global environmental awareness. This was the era in which women's special connection with nature became the point of debate within several environmental groups. These debates turned out with the central idea of women as victims of the environmental degradation, but by the end of the decade the image of women change to a more positive perspective as efficient managers of the environmental resources.

From this perspective of women as efficient environmental managers, Women in Development (WID) perspectives were developed. Later, these approaches also integrated the environmental domain and transformed into Women, Environment and Development (WED). WID and WED approaches had the gender division of labour and the static conception of women's roles as starting points. The WID approach was focused mostly on women's activities with the tendency to portray women as a homogenous group with a natural and universal connection to the environment. The WED perspective did not necessarily state that this women-environment connection was universal and natural, it was through the alliance with the ecofeminist arguments that this idea gradually became strong (Leach, 2007).

Ecofeminism is defined by a number of authors (Mellor, 2002; Lorentzen & Eaton, 2002; Leach, 2007; Mies & Shiva, 1993) as an activist and academic movement that consider a critical connection between the oppression and subordination of women and the domination and exploitation of nature, which is rooted in an ancient connectedness and holistic thinking. Ecofeminism brought together elements from the green movements and the second-wave of feminism, but at the same time offering a challenge to merge ideas. As a result of this 'alliance' a series of ecofeminist conferences inspired women involved in development to take action about their claims.

After the formation and intervention of these activist organizations, the way in which the natural link between women and nature was conceptualized, started to be criticised. Social feminist and feminist environmentalist scholars' state that the link between women and nature derive from a social interpretation

of biology and social construct of gender (Rochelau et al., 1996). This analytical point of view takes in consideration the influence of society in the conception of this inherent link which results in the conceptual framework called feminist political ecology. Feminist political ecology according to Rochelau (1996) and Elmhirst (2011) analyses gender as a 'critical variable' in shaping the control and access to natural resources and its interactive role with class, caste, race, culture and ethnicity that shape the struggles men and women face towards the development of a sustainable and ecologic livelihoods.

The approach of the feminist political ecology framework merges a range of disciplines, from gendered access to resources and property rights (water and land) to the dynamic action of social movements in policy discourses (Elmhirst, 2011). These intersections of objectives invite us to direct our attention towards many of the critical topics of our age: poverty, social justice, politics of environmental degradation and the neoliberalist politics of nature.

After the inclusion of these frameworks within society we start to be more aware of how our current social structure is the main influential factor in the administration of the natural resources. As a result society also starts to question whether the predominant patriarchal societal structure was efficient regarding administration of natural resources. Therefore, the inclusion of women in decision making positions was considered crucial in order to include the feminist perspective. The framework of feminist political ecology presents to us the urgent need to consider gender inequalities as a critical variable in the designation and election of who is going to be in charge of the administration of natural resources; especially in the marginalized areas of the world.

However, it is not just about inclusion of the feminist perspective, it is also important to consider the interactive role of culture and social structure in these marginalised areas. Therefore, I consider it important to question whether the women included in the politic frame can truly understand and represent the necessities and concerns of the marginalized women in developing countries. Furthermore, I pose the question to what extent the introduction of the neoliberalism and globalization projects contributes to enhance the sustainable development in these areas.

## Gender inequalities and globalization processes

Local, national and international development programs have shaped the circumstances under which gendered land and resources tenure have been administrated. Nevertheless, the understanding of the administration regimes within agrarian systems in developing countries have been elemental tools to understand gendered roles in natural resource management. Identifying and understanding these informal administrative structures provides and additional entry-point to shape law and policies regarding natural resource management.

Informal administrative institutions are predominantly directed by men, which means that wom-

en frequently do not formally participate in the decision making committees and do not possess land rights. These cases are clearly illustrated in the work made by Delgado and Zwartveen (2015) they present a series of cases where Andean women struggle to obtain formal recognition over the land and water rights due to the complex 'machista' social structure that predominate in the rural area. The main issue in this Andean rural area is that water and land rights distributions is seen as man's task, furthermore the authors states that agency is an important concept to consider. Agency "is the capacity of social actors to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life" (Delgado & Zwartveen, 2015, p. 504). These cases exemplify why it is important to consider the influence of social structure and culture when policies regarding land tenure and natural resources administration are being created.

In some social structures men and women are not aware of the unequal situations of representation in legal matters because they are internalized in this patriarchal constitution of their social structure, whereby they accept this as normal or natural living conditions. But what happens when women become aware that these unequal situations are not beneficial for them? Women start to bargain their positions in the social structure and by using their agency they can persuade a change in their role within the society. The motivations for these groups of women to confront the patriarchal social structure is unequal access to land and water which creates the problems they face day-to-day. They also challenge the hierarchical structure defined by class, ethnicity and caste, which in most of the cases define which group of men and women could be involved in the political domain. This unequal representation in the political domain accentuates the social division.

Research done by Joshi (2014) in the Darjeeling Himalaya district exemplifies how class, ethnicity and other divide factors are confronted by women. In this case study the author questions whether women organizations involved in the political domain were unable to transform the current water distribution system because of the patriarchal nature of the social system or whether the power and political environment around them corrupt these women. Joshi (2014) points out the specific case of two women who changed their career; an academic environmentalist who is now leader of one of the women organization against the water issues and the contrasted situation of a female politician, who previously was participating in grass-root movements. But both women have chosen not to engage in the politics of gender and environmental solidarity. These cases exemplify how individual interest can influence the assumed solidarity among women. This points to the urgent need to pay attention to women's particular circumstances and how individual political aspirations obstruct the transition from the current political structure towards a solidarity situation which enhance an equal distribution of access to the elemental natural resources needed for people's livelihood.

### Social values and incorporation of women into globalization processes: A conflict of interest

This section discusses how the intersection of social values (e.g. justice, solidarity, empathy, etc.) is in conflict with globalization processes.

“Where globalisation means, as it so often does, that the rich and powerful now have new means to further enrich and empower themselves at the cost of the poorer and weaker, we have a responsibility to protest in the name of universal freedom. Globalisation opens up the marvellous opportunities for human beings across the globe to share with one another, and to share with greater equity in the advances of science, technology and industries.” (Nelson Mandela, 2000)

This is an ideal conceptualization of how globalization could be, equal opportunities of development which overcome gender division and renew the historically hierarchical social structure governing in mostly all the cultures in the world.

But the changes in the global political economy have influenced the lives of women in many parts of the world. The strategy of economic restructuring processes incorporate women as essential labour force. Most of these restructuring processes involve the expansion of agribusiness which promote the introduction of agro-export activities in many developing countries such as Latin America.

The promotion of this agro-export activities have caused a rapid change in the agricultural and employment patterns in those countries. The most remarkable change is the employment of large numbers of women for the agricultural activities. The impact of these changes in the traditional agricultural activities is perceived on how women are challenged to not lose their traditional identity within the society and adapt to the new wave of changes.

But these changes are two-sided. There are three positive aspects that can be mentioned. The first positive aspect is that women can now be part of wage labour activities which allow them to have economic independence. The second positive aspect is that women frequently have access to organizations which make them aware that they can question their traditional gender roles and claim for equal work rights. The third aspect is that women participating in these organizations can increase the pressure within the social structure to recognize their unpaid work (e.g. child caring, household activities, farming activities in the family farm.). But unfortunately these changes also have a negative side. The first negative aspect is that women are still excluded from the decisions about the use of land which means that the traditional patterns of male dominance within decision making remain slow to change. The second negative aspect is that even when women are considered as an essential part of the labour force in the agro-export industry, the working conditions are deplorable. The third aspect concerns the community in general, because they face a depletion situation of land and water as a result of the unsustainable ways of production these companies employ.

These globalization processes could represent

an economic growth for the communities, but the detrimental effects produced represent a conflict of interest. On the one hand governments are interested to introduce them because they represent a quick economic growth in the short run which benefits a small percentage of society. On the other hand, the introduction of transnational companies “promote” the inclusion of women in the wage labour, but this situation is not entirely beneficial for them because it means that women now need to carry a double burden. This double burden means that women need to look for true recognition of their contributions to their community in order to start a transition towards gender equality.

### Conclusion

In the introduction I stated that the aim of this essay was to explore whether women involved in the political domain could truly represent the interest and concerns of women in developing countries. After reviewing the complexity of the factors (e.g. social values, culture, individual interest, political and economic issues) that need to be taken into account, one can state that there is not a simple answer to this question. The inclusion of women within the political domain represent a step forward in the process of reaching gender equality, but it is important that transition entails a long term vision. Feminist political ecology can be seen as a valid response to this transition and to claim for genuine recognition of the double burdens women carry. There is the urgent need to create a holistic transformation in the constitution of our social structure. The incorporation of some women in public spaces cannot represent all women’s interest and concerns, still it represents a progressive change towards gender equality.

“The difference between a politician and a statesman is that a politician thinks about the next election while the statesman think about the next generation”. Hillary Clinton

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# HOW EFFECTIVE IS THE ‘GENDER QUOTA’?

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### Introduction

After years of debate around a gender quota on board positions, Germany has decided in 2015 to implement the quota from January 1st, 2016 onwards (Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). Motivations for the implementation of the quota are to reduce the unequal payment between men and women, to overcome the gender gap in employment and to support female decision-making through engagement in leadership positions. Further arguments are that a women may favour employment of other women, which potentially changes current male dominated business structures and makes companies more successful (BMFSFJ, 2015).

Other countries like France, Spain and Belgium are currently implementing a gender quota (France and Spain 40 percent, Belgium 33 percent; Bauernschuster & Fichtl, 2012 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). Scandinavian countries are seen as frontrunners in implementing a gender quota with special emphasis on Norway, which implemented the quota already in 2003 and started to impose strong penalties up to company closure if quotas would not be met in 2006. (Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015).

At European Union (EU) level much discussion has been created when Viviane Reding proposed an obligatory quota of 40 percent for the EU. She argued that voluntary regulations have not changed significantly women’s representation in board positions and proposed therefore an obligatory quota as the only effective way for change (Yannakoudakis, 2012). Poor results of voluntary regulations are also confirmed by other case analyses (Buckley, Mariani and White, 2014; Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). Public discussions question however the effect of obligatory regulations and emphasise the potential of voluntary standards as being set up by the companies themselves. Some people go even further and discuss how far the European Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 157, Dejure, 2009) would be dismissed with the implementation of the quota (Sueddeutsche, 2014). Other opponents argue that the quota is not effective as there might be not enough qualified female staff, see the governments interference as a discrimination against qualified men and in general that the quota would take away freedom from companies to make decisions (Freitag, 2014).

These controversial points of view on the implementation of the gender quota motivated me to look more into how gender is constructed, what the gender quota developments in Europe are, what the gender quota change in Norway did, what the potential impact of the quota on Germany is and how far the gender quota meets the demands of today’s wom-

en?

### The construction of gender

Gender is a socially constructed term that is flexible over time and place. Women and men are related to different roles and responsibilities within society. Roles and responsibilities are culturally embedded and appear natural to us (Joshi, 2016; Liebrand, 2016). Small children are already formed through choices of colours, toys, stories and responsibilities, but also through role models within their own environment. Carlander (1997) wonders, if children are unconsciously performing gender expectations of their parents and also future employers. This thought is motivated through a French survey (entitled “Opération 50 lycées” (Operation 50 High Schools)), which investigated parents’ wishes on the development of their children. Parents wished that their sons would have a successful career (as in economics or science), while they wanted a happy family life for their daughters. The sociologist Catherine Marry has investigated that supposed incompatibility of science and women is not taken for granted when female family members work in science already. However, as soon as the employment stops the conception may change again. Within the study mentioned above, lecture-pupil behavior was filmed secretly. Its analysis showed that “teachers frequently single out the differences between girls and boys”, science lectures spend 20 percent more time with boys, and girls ask in general less questions and are more interrupted during their answers. During university studies girls are motivated to study something of their interest while boys tend to be more career oriented in their study choice (Carlander, 1997). The same tendencies can be found concerning employment of men and women (see also Limitations of gender quota). Carlander (1997) sees that gender stereotypes are often strengthened by underlying assumptions (e.g. “Yet there is no proof of any innate differences between the male and female brain”), which are even published in popular scientific journals. Women’s low representation in professional working fields such as science creates great imbalance and steers citizenship and national control (Carlander, 1997).

### The European Union and gender quota

While women represent 51.04 percent of the European Union’s population, their representation in the workspace and especially in leadership positions is far from equal with in average 13 percent less employment (Joannin, 2012). This gap can be seen even more extreme in academic fields (especially in sciences and economics), as well as chief executive officer positions (e.g. European Commission, 2015; Joannin, 2012;

Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). Equal payment of women and men by equal work or an equal value is already defined in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Article 157, 1-2), but the reality is far from being met. Women are over-represented in lower paid sectors within the EU, but largely under-represented in decision-making of leadership positions (also called the 'glass ceiling'). While 60 percent of university graduates are women, only 33 percent work as scientists or engineers, and only every fourth member of national parliaments is a woman (with big variations between the countries) (Joannin, 2012). A proposed European gender quota is not yet established, but the 'Europe 2020 strategy' is promoting gender balance of advisory boards, gives grants for research teams working on gender balance and lobbies a work programme (European Commission, 2015). Up till now many companies are taking actions against EU wide quota implementations (e.g. 'Nine EU states' group in 2012). How far obliged quotas change the situation and esteem of women in leadership positions might differ from country to country. In India a gender quota in governmental assemblies resulted in a primarily negative view on women when being delegated in their positions by the quota. Nonetheless they gained self-esteem through repeated elections (Beaman et al., 2009 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015) Furthermore Geisse and Hust (2005 in Buckley, Mariani and White, 2014) see that quotas have a positive impact on women's ambition to run for election.

#### Norway's implemented gender quota

Proponents of the gender quota often use Norway as a successful example of gender equality. With the aim of more leading positions for women and an equal salary for men and women the gender quota was implemented in Norway in 2008 (Freitag, 2014). Companies that do not meet the targeted number face high penalties and a shut down of company associations. During the quota implementation stock markets reacted with a drop. Companies that did not have female board members were stronger impacted than companies with previous female members. Reasons are found in the assumption that women reduce the number of employees fired, which is understood in terms of stronger consideration of employees needs and a long-term perspective of personnel decision (Matsa and Miller, 2013 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015), and represents higher expenses in the short term perspective. Another tendency observed is that boards that included women make more risky decisions, which is seen in relation to their common Master of Business Administration degree and their young age which leads to higher risk taking and more aggressive business strategies (Bertrand and Schoar, 2003 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). Women's success is often dependent on their integration and access to information within the board. Norway's example shows also that female members of supervisory committees often hold three more positions in different companies than their male colleagues (Seierstad and Opsahl, 2011 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). This strengthens their net-

work and influence but at the same time lowers their working quality (Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015).

Freitag (2014) refers to an analysis of Norway's quota implementation by four economic experts who warn to be too optimistic on the changes that come through the quota implementation. Positive impacts could be measured in the decline of payment gaps, changes in previous masculine dominated company structures as well as in women's minds. Women perceive more possibilities to gain higher salaries and more career possibilities. This is however in contrast to the perception of the experts in the study. The previous presumed fear of not having enough qualified women has been disproved and newly employed women are often more qualified compared to their male colleagues. In general impacts of the quota have been greater for leadership positions than for lower management positions (Freitag, 2014). Supervisory committees contain more female members who are in general younger and with a higher education than their competitors, but the number of female employment did not increase higher than the determined quota (Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). No impact could be found on the low number of female economy students as well as the primary salary of women after graduation (Freitag, 2014).

Before the quota implementation 37 (46.3 percent) concerned companies had changed their legal form before the implementation to overcome their responsibilities (Ahern and Dittmar, 2012 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). Considering this high number Norway's move towards gender equality loses its strength.

#### Germany's implementation of the gender quota

In 2001 meetings were held by the German government and bigger companies on the possibilities to increase gender equality in private businesses. Ever since there is a trend of more female members in advisory committee and creased again when the gender quota implementation was discussed in public by 2011. All 108 national companies need to adjust their entire supervisory committee with a minimum of 30 percent female members (Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). Companies with this legal status are economically outstanding and are therefore strongly recognised by society representing a role model function (BMFSFJ, 2015). Additionally, 3500 listed companies are obliged to reach a certain number of members in supervisory committees, chair positions, and higher management. If target numbers are not met companies need to report the reasoning (Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). According to a study made by Bayers in 2015 almost half of these corresponding companies did not send employee representatives in the supervisory committee through which they do not have to apply to the quota (Bayers, 2015 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015), which reduces significantly the expected impact of the quota.

Economic experts presume the negative economic impacts of an introduction of the quota and question if women will gain more career possibilities and higher salaries through the quota (Beaman et al., 2009 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015; Bertrand et al.,

2014 in Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). According to a survey of the German government 51 percent of German executives reject a gender quota and even more the established 30 percent gender quota (Pipke and Pönitzsch, 2015). It is questionable if this rejection will stay or if it changes over time as most decisions need time to become generally accepted within society.

#### Beyond the gender quota

The gender quota can be understood as a tool to empower women, meaning to provide them the capacity of improving their life while obtaining rights on decision-making, increasing self-reliance and control over resources (Cleaver, 1999). Are women empowered through the quota implementation? Evans (2014) questions if most women would like to use the quota to work in male dominated structures. She clusters women in three main categories: first of all highly successful women having childcare at home, secondly women preferring part-time employment and thirdly women who desire other working structures (e.g. starting their own business). In her opinion the third group is more and more represented in current societies. While women tend to choose what satisfies them, men are rather career oriented. At the same time she sees that more men of the current generation desire greater freedom, a different way of living and breaking out of the trap of always wanting more. Evans (2014) wonders if women following these desires already for a long time are maybe ahead with this consideration. Tackling the gender gap is a complex issue. It requires that everybody is treated as an individual, everybody's needs are satisfied and that companies provide opportunities for women to develop themselves further. Leaving the structures as they have been may not solve the problem, as employed women in leadership positions tend to have similar social and professional backgrounds as their male colleagues and take therefore similar decisions. What a company rather needs is diversity of employees to assess problems differently and look on customer's needs (Evans, 2014).

#### Conclusion

Gender is often understood as a binary where masculinity is valued rather higher (Zwarteveen, 2016; Galli, 2016). Especially in male dominated organizations and boards hegemonic masculinity is exercised in learning structures and knowledge creation. When defining gender, masculinity is used as a starting point and consequently everything that is not defined as masculine becomes feminine (Liebrand, 2016). But what if you would change the perspectives of the starting point, how would characteristics be given to men and women and how would they change social norms and believes within society? Still what remains with the concept of gender is a narrow view on women and men and its ignorance of individuals.

The above described analysis shows that the implementation of a gender quota is complex and highly depending on its regulations and place of implementation. As companies still search for diverse

ways to bypass the quota regulations, there is a clear need for implementing obligatory gender quotas together with incentives and guidelines for companies. One may argue that companies which do not find sufficient women who are willing to work within the existing working structures may see incentives to change their norms and believes. This might be more the case because of different desires in employment by women (and men) than the problem of too little qualified female employees (as shown in the case of Norway). Another possibility to break the 'glass ceiling' may follow the example of Switzerland stating in their vacancies a preference for women. The emphasis on sector specific minorities (gender, nationality) provides potential for a different way to increase equality, but requests also from companies interest in moving towards (gender) equality. Companies' move towards employee oriented services (e.g. childcare, possibilities of longer maternity leaves) are a promising step that foster female employment and potentials to balance family life and professional careers and may be more suitable for the demands of the new generation. Professional cultures are not 'fixed' and will continuously change which will also bring the gender quota into a different light.

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# THE ARMY'S INFLUENCE ON WOMEN'S SOCIETAL ROLE: EXPLORING THE ISREALI CASE

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## Introduction

We had given it a long thought whether we should go to Jerusalem or not, since it was a time in which Palestinian stabbing attacks on Israelis were occurring on a daily basis, especially in Jerusalem's Old City. I can still remember this moment very clearly. Coming out of the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem on a hot autumn day in October last year, the first thing that caught my attention was a young, attractive woman standing right outside the entrance staring at her smartphone. What was special about her was that next to her handbag she was wearing a M16 assault rifle. On my way to the train station I stumbled upon more heavily armed men and women that often looked like they were even younger than me. It was a thrilling moment because I have never witnessed teenagers in general, and such young women in particular, carrying arms in everyday life.

I was visiting Israel because of Maya, a 26-year old Israeli that I was travelling with through Kenya for several months earlier that year. During that time we talked a lot about Israeli society, about Judaism and about the mandatory military service for women and I can say that she is the one that awakened my first interest in feminism and gender issues. During my stay in Israel I met several of Maya's friends who without me asking about it mentioned their military service in some of our conversations. I was wondering in what way military service is shaping young Israeli women and to what extent it is strengthening the position of women within Israeli society in general. In order to investigate this question I aim to combine academic literature with the concepts I have learned during the last three weeks concerning gender issues and feminism. Additionally, I will include some insights of my friend Maya that I thought would be relevant for the exploration of my research question. I will first give a short overview of the development of women within the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Subsequently, I will focus on the current role of women within the IDF as well as their relation towards male comrades and the IDF in general. In order to analyse these relations I will include different feminist approaches and keep the aspect of intersectionality within the socially complex Israeli state in mind. Finally, I will provide a summary and formulate a conclusion on if and how far the IDF is shaping women's role within the state of Israel.

## Development of women within the IDF

For a long time Israel was the only country in the world

where women were drafted for a compulsory military service, while recently Norway and Eritrea have also adopted this policy (OHCHR, Reuters). Women served in the Israeli army since the founding of the state in 1948 and before they were already part of it. In 2000 the Security Service Law was passed that confirmed equality between men and women in entering specific ranks throughout the whole military (Levy, 2010). In 2011, 33 percent of all IDF soldiers and 51 percent of its officers were female, taking into consideration that they serve not 3 years like men but only 2, with the possibility of performing in around 90 percent of the roles within the army. In the beginning women were only employed in service or auxiliary positions, but this changed gradually with women being employed even in combat roles since the establishment of the Caracal Battalion in 2000. Despite this achievement women made up only around 3 percent of the combat soldiers in 2011 (IDF website). Later in my analysis, I will highlight why this is problematic.

## The IDF and societal gender relations

The gender allocation in Israeli society is comparable to other Western democracies in some ways. Although women and men are supposed to have equal rights as citizens and the same economic possibilities, the reality looks rather different (Yoav Lavee & Ruth Katz, 2002; Herzog, 2004, Bryson, 1996). Nonetheless, aspects like the role of religion, the unique establishment of the Israeli state, the profound separation of Israeli society and the constant fear and reality of war that make this case exceptional (Bryson, 1996). In the following section I am going to explain in which way the IDF is playing a crucial role in these gender relations and how it is reinforcing rather than solving the inequality of men and women within Israeli society.

The traditional assumption that men are supposed to represent the public sphere (economic, political, and military representation) whereas women are seen as the representative of the domestic and inner sphere (emotions, intimacy, caring, etc.) is still present in Israel (Herzog, 2004). One might argue that integrating women in the military as a traditional part of the public sphere might strengthen women's position in civil society, but the IDF has remained "a male-oriented, macho subculture" (Herzog, 2004).

This subculture plays a crucial role within Israeli society due to the constant threat of war in which Israel finds itself due to the ongoing conflict with neighbouring Arab countries and the Palestinian Territories

in particular. This leads to an incredible high position of soldiers within society, especially Jewish Ashkenazi (European origin) combat soldiers. They are embodying the perfect citizen, someone who is serving the state through defence and having the willingness to die for the collective good if necessary (Sasson-Levy, 2002). This hegemonic status of the male Jewish combat soldier is also experienced by Maya who answers to the question of how combat soldiers are regarded within Israeli society:

“As heroes, basically. They are adored by women, the most prestigious thing you can do as a high school girl is to date a combat soldier. They are considered “everybody’s sons”, like you will find plenty of stories about how someone saw a group of combat soldiers at a restaurant and paid their entire bill.”

In addition to that she emphasized that combat soldier also profit later on in their career through their engagement within the army. This linkage between masculinity and good citizenship is a strong and dominant assumption within the Israeli context. Although 90 percent of the army positions are open for women, the ten remaining percent are mainly combat positions. Together with the already mentioned limited 3 percent female combat soldiers, this shows that the possibility of gaining social acknowledgement for women through the army is rather exiguous.

#### Gender relations and feminist approaches

There are several feminist approaches to this issue. The liberal feminist approach is claiming a wider opening of the combat positions for women to “eliminate cultural–social barriers in the civil sphere, equalising gender rights, and facilitate democratic principles” (Levy, 2010, p. 188). Strengthening women’s position within the army is supposed to be transferred into civil society. This approach is heavily criticised by the radical feminist approach, which regards the problem in the masculine and violent structure of the IDF itself. In addition to that it is claimed that the compulsory military service is reaffirming gender stereotypes (Levy, 2010; Bryson, 1996).

There were several studies conducted to examine the different ways in which female soldiers behave during their military service. Some of them choose to adapt traditionally masculine character traits and mimic the prestigious role of the male combat soldier. They behave in a way to be considered equal to their male comrades which includes a different way of talking, moving and outward appearance. This is highly problematic because it is strengthening the role of the military as an institution that is identifying soldierhood as exclusively masculine and is thereby not challenging but rather strengthening the unequal military gender order (Sasson-Levy, 2003). A different behaviour that is seen especially with so called Lone Girls (Orlee Hauser refers to them as women who serve on a male dominated military base) is that they try to use typical female character traits to gain advantages of their service time. This is done especially through emotional support of male soldiers as some

kind of social worker or psychologist, through acting like a family member and doing all kinds of supportive tasks for the male psyche. In addition to that they use their outward appearance to attract male attention and enjoy being surrounded by interested men. Hauser (2011) argues that these girls are “doing gender” to gain advantage in this masculine domain, but while it may serve their self-confidence and may make their military service more pleasurable, it is again strengthening essentialist ideas and stereotypes of women in need of protection and of men being the protector.

This demonstrates that although there might be some personal benefits in doing the military service (Maya stated that some of her friends got many responsibilities and learnt important skills) there is an asymmetry in what women contribute to the army and what they get out of it for their status in civilian life later on (Levy, 2010). In other words, the liberal feminist idea of allowing women access to all areas of combat might accidentally strengthen the existing connection between the army and masculinity and the male combat soldier and good citizenship in particular. Another important aspect that needs to be further researched is the way in which intersectionality plays a role within the army. Unfortunately, these feminist approaches are mainly valid only for moderate, often secular, educated Ashkenazi women from the Israeli middle class while not taking into account the intricate structure of the Israeli society. Mizrahi women (Jews with Arab origin) mostly come from lower income families and therefore often serve in groups like the Israel Border Police which is, according to Maya, known for their high recruitment of people with minority background because they are often not able to enter higher positions in the military hierarchy (Rimalt, 2003). Another interesting group are religious women within the army. Although there is an enormous resistance of religious groups against the strengthening of women’s position within the army, a fear that the gender hierarchy within these religious communities could be altered, the number of religious women joining the army has grown significantly during the last years (Levy, 2010). Unfortunately, these women are often found at the bottom of the armies’ hierarchy due to being caught in the middle of a lasting conflict between women and religious communities while none of these groups is giving them the possibility to speak up (for more information see Levy, 2010). New legislations that might strengthen the position of women are criticised by Rabbis who objects to religious male soldiers serving alongside women in the same units (Sasson-Levy, 2003). Therefore, the equalization process and the endeavour for opening up combat positions might only have an impact on particular groups of women.

#### Conclusion

This essay gives a glimpse of the complexity in which women find themselves within Israeli society. As has been mentioned before, there is a need for investigating every social group in detail in order to genuinely understand how a woman’s position within the Israeli

society is constructed. As demonstrated above, the military service is not strengthening women’s position in a way liberal feminists would like to see it. Herzog (1998) states in one of her articles, “life in the shadow of a protracted Arab-Israeli conflict and constant threat has become a powerful mechanism that reproduces a gendered binary world.” In other words, the constant state of emergency and fear of war has given the military and the male combat soldier in particular an enormously high status that will not give women the possibility to gain equal rights through the military within the near future. I agree with Orna Sasson-Levy (2003) in her outlook that only progress in the peace process within the Arab world and the Palestinian Territories in particular could lead to a break-up of the strong patriarchal connection between military and good citizenship. As long as there is a constant threat, women’s equal rights and full participation in state institutions will remain wishful thinking.

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# WOMEN'S RIGHTS BEFORE AND AFTER MARRIAGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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## Introduction

The following essay explores women's rights and the shift in their rights from being unmarried to married. Here, I will in particular focus on the Middle East as there exist widely spread and known traditional stereotypes between men and women. Also the consequently following gender specific role allocations are different compared to the European cultures which makes this topic even more interesting to me. In the end of the essay, I will connect the current situation to concepts discussed in the lectures in order to find ways to empower women and their rights.

## Women's rights before and after marriage

The Middle East's life styles and gender roles are deeply rooted in and based on religious, traditional values and norms. There are no other countries known which struggle that much with gender inequalities and women's subordination in society than the Middle East countries (Nazir & Tomppert, 2005). It started even earlier than in the nineteenth century- the traditional image of the woman according to the Quran was that she was always expected to be the perfect daughter and wife and to do everything for her husband. Thus, once a woman was married in the Middle East, she was viewed as property and object of the husband and only the man held the right to get a divorce (Mabsoot, 2006). Also the whole family was constructed as patriarchal unit (Moghadam, 2004).

Before a woman gets married in MEC's, they often become victims of discrimination in employment or domestic violence. Migrant females are even more vulnerable to be abused due to their lack of education or language barriers. Thereby, trafficking is an increasing issue in the Middle East. Also in public spheres do women not have a voice, even if it is said by the government that there should exist gender equality principles. However, these are often not implemented by the corresponding authorities, so men stay the dominant representatives in public and private domains (Nazir & Tomppert, 2005). Also the level of income defines power relations of people and their status in society in these countries, so that unmarried women do not even have the chance to get a voice in public to improve their situation as they only get exploited and abused by males (Zuhur, 2003).

This shows that the traditional thinking was maintained in Arabic countries until now, meaning that religious endogamy marriages are still preferred. Muslim women further experience restrictions in

their marriage partners. A Muslim woman marrying for example a Christian, would also change her official religion membership and their children will then also follow the religion of the father. Thereby, the number of Muslim women would decrease, so that most of the Middle Eastern countries prohibited Muslim women to marry Non-Muslim men. Thereby, women have less choices, while men can marry women of each arbitrary religion. After they finally get married, men are representing the "primary citizen", indicating that they have been constituted through their roles as heads of patriarchal families (Joseph, 2000).

This broadly spread tradition that women are wives and carers of children and household while the men is representing the family in public sphere, is still expected to be continued and followed by women in their roles. Once a woman is married, she is also not viewed as adequate citizen anymore because of their emotionality-led actions. And on the basis of this, and according to the Middle East perspective, women need control and care through the influence of their husbands (Joseph, 2000).

In addition to that, married women have to ask their fathers, brothers or husbands for permission to open businesses and even to travel (Joseph, 2000). This means that every step a wife takes is controlled by her husband or male family members. The married woman is even more dependent on males and cannot freely choose anymore where to go or what to work in public.

This Middle Eastern patriarchy has been very powerful so far because of its deep rooting in kinship and its consequent impacts on gendering citizenship, which has led to shifts in all spheres (private, public, governmental, non-governmental as well as state, civil and society). Also patriarchal structures are supported through some laws as for instance that women and seniors are not allowed to own property (Joseph, 2000).

However, some of the above mentioned customs are debatable because in referring to the Quran nowadays, women have officially the chance to participate in public affairs and join elections. Nevertheless, in the Middle East, many men still follow the principle that they take the full responsibility for the maintenance of their wives, as well as their children and their female needy relatives. This in turn means that generally women are viewed as physically and mentally weaker than men and, thus as ineligible for the position of head of state and responsible voter. To

be the head of the state requires sometimes decisions in which you are not led by emotionality, rather than rationality. And women are associated with being instinctively led by their emotions (Mabsoot, 2006).

But there exist also some specific controversial cases, in which women have certain benefits over their husbands. In theory, referring to the Quran, the possessions that a woman had before the marriage will not officially be transferred to her husband later and she can also keep her maiden name. Moreover, married women are not forced to spend their income or properties on their families (Mabsoot, 2006).

Another example is that during the time period when females have their menstrual periods or forty days after childbirth, they do not have to participate in daily prayers and are exempted from fasting. Moreover, in case of pregnancy and when a woman is nursing the baby, she is also exempted from fasting. And if she missed the obligatory month of fasting (Ramadan), she can always make up for these missed days whenever she can (Mabsoot, 2006). Though, in practice, women are in many regions not allowed to own property assets such as lands and other resources which would be essential for an independent life based on gender equality principles. This shows that in theory, everything seems easy and logical according to the Quran, whereas the practical part is not really realizable because of the narrow-minded traditional values the men in the Middle East are following.

## Analysis: How to empower women?

But what can be done to empower women in Arabic countries and to support gender equality? There might exist many potential "solutions", however it cannot be ensured that these will be truly implemented and successful.

First of all, a shift should take place from the domestic, unpaid work of married women to additional paid labor in public companies. Through this change, women would get the chance to contribute to the family's income and at the same time to generate economic growth. Furthermore, they can then represent their gender in society and, finally can try to participate in community decision-making forums and to be increasingly involved in project implementation management.

Secondly, to perform a Social Relations Approach might helpful to support women's rights before and after a marriage in society. The ultimate goal of this approach is the development of human well-beings and not only of economic growth or improved productivity. Human well-being includes proper living standard, security (political, economic, environmentally) and autonomy, meaning that women and men work together and cooperate in public/private sphere to pursue personal, as well as collective goals. In this approach, the focus is on social relations and to get an overview of what the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the Middle East are, how they relate to others, what choices they can make, what control we have over their own lives and

the lives of their family members, relatives on who they depend. Here, through an increasing thinking of the current situation of women's rights compared to men's rights, the existing gender inequalities and the slowly increasing involvement of women in public affairs and employment, the unfair gender inequalities can be reproduced across institutional hierarchies. In the ideal case, institutions should be neutral towards gender, class and not interconnected only with similar institutions. To understand gender relations and to be able to improve them, authorities need to change property rights of women, their access to resources, as well as the access to appropriate and equal education. Thereby women's level of involvement in public affairs and in the labor market increase and women can be viewed more productive than before. Also their partners/ husbands would start to see their wives as more equally ordained, even though it might take some time to change their thoughts and traditional norms and values. A better cooperation between wife and husband would be established and financially viewed, they would enhance their level of income and could afford better living standards for their family.

An implementation of stricter policies and regulations would support this approach to empower women and, in turn would help to prevent civil disobedience and domestic violence. One case shows that there have been some already successfully executed laws. Their implementations were initiated by some feminist movements and demonstrations. The so-called "Family Protection Law," implemented in Jordan in 2005, urged medical institutions, police and courts to take victims of domestic abuse, especially women, seriously (Kelly & Breslin, 2010). Nevertheless, there exist also pathways to empowerment and development of societal structures: across different contexts, women are differently able and capable to exercise voice and strategic forms of control over their own lives and this is closely linked to their ability of generating regular and independent sources of income to support their husbands, parents and children.

On the basis of this, it can be said that there currently exists a non-dialogical gender interface, meaning that men in the Middle East control access to resources, they control decision-making processes, and they are the representatives of the society. But to achieve a dialogical and complementary gender interface in the society, a general change has to take place with the help of the above mentioned approaches. Women should then also get an enhanced or even equal access to fundamental resources, so that they (married or unmarried) can share gender roles, go to work, earn money, contribute to the economic growth, but also take care of households and children. A family network has to be created, so that women and men share and complement each other in their responsibilities in the household, child caring and work. Then, empowerment of women would be automatically created and a rejection of their subordination would take place.

## Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that some feminist efforts to fight for gender equality in the Middle East took already place which also achieved remarkable levels of sophistication. These worked towards the aim to reshape the national society structures, to redefine citizens as belonging to a “modern state” and achieve general enhancement in women’s rights to get equal education and employment (Joseph, 2000).

It is obvious that the Middle East was dominated by a non-dialogical gender interface and a so-called “masculinization” process until now, meaning that men represent the dominant and powerful gender in society, whereas women are subordinated by men. Men do have access to all the fundamental resources in the Middle East, while women only had the choice between being unmarried and as labor force exploited, discriminated and unfairly treated or being married and lose that little possibility to go to work and only stay at home, perform domestic work and child caring while the man is representing the head of the family in public and goes to work.

In my opinion, the education of people and the values and norms they get taught in particular school institutions play a big role in Arabic communities, which did not support a “modernization” process of the Middle East until now. Men still adhere to traditional values, including the belief that women, married or not, should not participate in the regular labor market and should only try to find a man who takes the responsibility for them, to impregnate them, to feed them and their children, while they are at home and perform domestic work. Another aspect is that women are not even allowed to participate in official elections, whereas compared to that are men highly involved in public affairs and in policy implementations and other regulations.

Thus, I think that total gender equality will be hard to implement in these countries, but small steps might be realizable as there took already place some small enhancements. In my opinion, men and women should first get equal education and especially men should be taught that there exist already so many countries where gender equality is successfully implemented and that it has advantages on family level as well as on a national level. Through a better education and the implementation of some new policies, women might have the chance to get empowered and to finally get equal access to resources to improve their social status in the community.

To receive the attention of the corresponding policy authorities, more women’s and feminist movements should be established so that many women can publicly support fairer and better conditions for women in the Middle East. The focus here has to be on two things: first of all on the access to and control over resources, which enable a better status in the community and enhanced chances to get a profitable job, and secondly, on education of people in Arabic countries, because particularly men still follow traditional norms and values taught by their grandparents, parents’ religion and school. They have to get taught that women

can also take rational decisions and that you cannot generalize that men are more rationally and less emotionally led when deciding and acting.

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