
A discussion

Gender and environment: critical tradition and new challenges⁽¹⁾

Introduction

The motivation for this paper came from multiple conversations between the editors about gender and environment theory and practice. From our own research on the gendered politics that articulate particular spaces, environments, and subjects across scales (Hawkins, forthcoming; Ojeda, 2010), we felt the need to review current and past work in the field, looking for theoretical and methodological clues on how to better understand the relation between gendered subjects and the gendered environments they signify, inhabit, and transform. With this broad question in mind, we did a thorough reading of gender and environment work within geography with the desire to review how current and past work relate to and diverge from one another, and how current work in the field has encompassed theoretical advances in feminist theory, nature–society theory, and analyses of the social production of nature.

Reviewing a provocative set of work on the topic of gender and environment left us with further questions, including: How have those of us interested in gender–environment connections accounted for the role of gender in the uneven access to and control over resources? What are some recent trends and issues with respect to how we understand gender, environment, and the relations between the two? What are the directions in which this work is going, and what are the most urgent challenges it faces? In particular, we felt that there were important questions about the ways in which this loosely defined body of literature has addressed the gender category, its own politics of knowledge production, and the imaginings and possibilities of gender and environment theory and practice.

The field of gender and environment studies is inspired by an interest in environmental issues and an understanding that these issues are gendered in complicated and important ways. These gender–environment relations have significant symbolic and material consequences in how nature is understood, in how environmental resources and responsibilities are managed and distributed, and in gendered power dynamics that play out in the day-to-day lives of people around the world. At the same time, this relation between gender and environment is twofold: the gendered environments we signify, inhabit, and transform, and the gendered power relations implicated in the complex dynamics of resource access and control, play an important role in processes of subject formation. In other words, processes of differentiation to which gender is central are place bound and, as such, are intricately related with the environments—households, regions, habitats, bodies, neighborhoods, etc—being produced. Because of the fact that the field addresses these fundamental issues, we see gender and environment theorisations as being at the forefront of issues such as consumption (Hawkins, forthcoming), global change (Seager, 2009), neoliberalization processes (Katz, 1998; 2001), the body (Harcourt, 2009; Langston, 2010), environmental justice (Di Chiro, 2008), population debates (Hartmann, 2001; Hartmann and Hendrixson, 2005), violence and militarization (Kuletz, 2001; Loyd, 2009; Ojeda, 2010), and conservation (Mollett, 2010; Sundberg, 2004) among other areas of study. This makes delving into current understandings of and future trends in the field all the more important.

⁽¹⁾ This paper is the result of a collaborative effort. Editors and contributors are listed in alphabetical order.

Over the years, the understandings of 'environment' and 'gender' and their relation to one another have been conceptualized in various ways that continue to be questioned and reworked. Initially, ecofeminist influences in the field encouraged an examination of the 'closeness' of women and nature (often understood as innate) and the consequences of this (Mies and Shiva, 1993; Shiva, 1988). This analysis was expanded to look at this 'closeness' as a result of socially constructed binaries of femininity and masculinity (Merchant, 1990; Plumwood, 1993). It often also included investigating the gendered division of labor and environmental roles, paying close attention to issues like land titling, work, and women's rights to resources (Agarwal, 1992; Rocheleau, 1991; Schroeder, 1997) and issues of women's health and environmental justice struggles (King, 1993; Newman, 1994; Steingraber, 1997). Delving further into these gender–environment connections through the issue of population, Betsy Hartmann's (1987) work provided a careful analysis of how women's bodies, resource politics, and environmental discourses are articulated in complex relations of power. Focusing on a broader scale, Joni Seager's (1993) work identified the masculinist perspectives of many governmental and nongovernmental institutions, including the North American environmental movement itself.

Soon after, *Feminist Political Ecology* was edited by Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayter, and Esther Wangari (1996). Through their work, the authors included in the volume provided a conceptual umbrella within which to develop gender and environment theory further and called for a multiscale analysis of gendered rights and responsibilities, knowledge production, and politics. Inspired by these ideas, more recent work in the field has expanded on this call in a variety of ways to look more specifically at the constitution of gender, nature, and power in different contexts. This is particularly evident in several recent special issues focusing on these topics (*Gender, Place, and Culture* 2009; *Geoforum* forthcoming). Theorists have paid particular attention to how gender comes into being, along with other identities and markers through different interactions with, understandings of and changes in what constitutes the environment (eg Asher, 2007; Gururani, 2002; Nightingale, forthcoming; Sultana, 2006).

Taking a page from feminist theories, current work in the field has attempted to understand gender–environment relations through a poststructural understanding of the spatial and embodied practices through which gendered subjects are constituted. Authors such as Leila Harris (2006), Andrea Nightingale (2006a), and Juanita Sundberg (2004) have delved into Butler's (1990) concept of performativity and its role in the configuration of such relations. Paying attention to the body, many theorists have examined how gendered, raced, class-based, and other categories are materialized through spatial and social practices, many of which are intricately linked to particular environments and ideas about nature (eg Baptiste, 2005; Mollett, 2010; Sheller, 2003). This recent work reflects geographical literature on the production of nature, particularly scholars' attention to the relational processes through which gendered subjects, natures, and spaces are mutually constituted (Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2006a; Sultana, 2009a).

Additionally, nature–society theories on the privatization, commodification, and neoliberalization of nature have been important in further developing theories on the production of nature within some of the gender and environment literature. Authors engaging with these issues ask important questions about how gendered power dynamics, and in particular women's everyday lives, are directly and indirectly affected by capitalist productions of nature, for example, as this relates to water privatization (Ahlers and Zwarteveen, 2009; Harris, 2009; Rocheleau, 2007). Another important trend has revolved around the need to connect local gender and environment issues to global trends and institutions (Elmhirst and Resurreccion, 2008; Seager, 2010;

Seager and Hartmann, 2005; Sultana, 2009b). Following the concept of connections, common themes emerging in the literature include paying attention to environments and bodies in networked relations of power (Harcourt and Escobar, 2005; Rocheleau, 2008; Rocheleau and Roth, 2007), human and nonhuman relations (Anderson, 2000; Nightingale, 2006b; Whatmore, 2002), as well as issues of collaboration and environmental movements (Asher, 2009; Nagar with Ali et al, 2009; see Moeckli and Braun, 2001).

Inspired by this rich array of work and wanting to know how both junior and more seasoned scholars doing gender and environment work see the field shaping up over the last fifteen years and into the future, we asked scholars to comment from their own experiences on the issues that they feel most need to be attended to within gender and environment theory and practice today. We consider the conversation presented below an urgent one as we witness the way in which gender has been taken up in some areas of environmental work and policy (eg land titling) and less so in others (eg climate change). We see how gender and environment considerations have often successfully been accounted for at the scales of the household and the community, but there is much that still needs to be said about how gender matters for environmental issues across scales, such as those relevant to transnational conservation strategies, national environmental policies, regional food security, and the intimate spaces of the body. We see how the literature has addressed women, and even men, but less so the question of what *kinds* of women and men are being constituted by the very material practices through which we see, understand, (re)produce, and transform the multiple ecologies we are part of. We see that a lot of work has been done in relation to specific case studies, mostly in the Global South, but that much still needs to be said about gender and environment in the North (Reed and Christie, 2009), the countertopographies at stake (Katz, 2001), and the possibility for a politics of coalitions and alliances (Massey, 2004).

Panel dynamics

With the literature described briefly above and our own questions in mind, we decided to bring together a set of scholars who could speak to these issues. Our goal was to foster an honest conversation between these scholars about their own experiences and perspectives in the gender and environment field. This was accomplished through a panel session entitled “Gender and Environment: Critical Tradition and New Challenges” that took place April 14, 2010, as part of the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Washington, DC. The panel session was part of a broader discussion that included two paper sessions in which gender and environment relations were explored. The focus of these paper sessions was to open up the field to include questions of sexuality, masculinities, and intersectionality, as well as to explore their relation to different environments at multiple scales that included the nation-state as much as the body.

For the panel discussion we invited ten scholars whose work has been salient in relation to gender and environment issues that range from agroforestry in the Dominican Republic to reproductive rights in the United States. Some of them also have experience as development practitioners and policy designers. As expected, it was through our own mostly Anglocentric academic networks that we were able to read the panelists’ work and invite them to be part of this conversation, so all but one panelist were based in institutions in the North. That being said, the panel was diverse in other ways, with panelists identifying with a variety of subject positions based on geographical origin, gendered and racialized identities, age, experience, etc.

Most of the panelists are geographers by training and work both in Northern and Southern contexts. Of the ten invitees, seven scholars, listed here in speaking order,⁽²⁾ were able to attend: Dianne Rocheleau (DR), Andrea Nightingale (AN), Joni Seager (JS), Leila Harris (LH), Farhana Sultana (FS), Kiran Asher (KA), and Brigitte Baptiste (BB). Months before the panel we posed a series of questions for the group to consider:

- How has theorizing gender and environment changed in the last twenty years? What are the challenges that gender and environment theorists now face?
- How can we theorize the relationship between gender and environment from poststructuralist and postcolonial perspectives?
- What are the contingent ways in which gender and environment constitute each other?
- How is critical social theory useful to current challenges in gender and environment knowledge and political action?
- How should we, as concerned scholars, practitioners, activists, and citizens approach gender and environment work in the future?
- How do conceptions and practices of gender and environment differ in the North and South? How can we create alliances and coalitions across these differences?

To narrow the scope of the actual panel discussion itself, we asked panelists to speak from their own work and experience to one specific question: *What are the most important issues that need to be addressed in relation to gender and environment theory and practice?* Each panelist responded to this question for ten minutes, followed by a round of responses by the panel and audience questions [featuring a series of interesting questions from audience member Sharlene Mollett (SM)]. The paper that follows was developed from the transcription of the panel discussion. We highlight three of the main themes brought to light through our conversation: (i) moving beyond men and women, (ii) paying attention to connections between scales, sites, and struggles; and (iii) interrogating the politics of knowledge production. Each theme is described in detail below and as much as possible is elaborated on through direct quotes from the panel discussion.⁽³⁾ In the concluding section we draw out the issues that appeared most useful and interesting in terms of pursuing future work under the gender and environment umbrella.

With the intention to think with and write with panelists, the first and final drafts of this paper were circulated to all panel participants/contributors for feedback and additions in an attempt to develop a multivocal product that represented the current thoughts on the field, by this particular group of scholars, as openly as possible. This conversation, just like any other form of knowledge production, is situated and by no means constitutes a comprehensive survey of the work on gender and environment that has been produced in the last decade and a half. It is instead a reflection of and elaboration on the debates and points raised by the panel and audience members within the space of one lively and thoughtful discussion. We hope that this paper will inspire a commitment to continue these, often difficult, conversations in future work and with broader audiences.

⁽²⁾ The editors suggested the speaking order with areas of expertise in mind.

⁽³⁾ Panelists addressed, in their own ways, all of the themes discussed below. That some voices appear more prominent in certain sections of the paper reflects editorial decisions made with a view to presenting these arguments more coherently as well as the general flow of the panel discussion in which the first part of the discussion centered around the first two themes and the last part focused more specifically on the final theme.

Key themes

(i) *Beyond men and women: troubling gender and intersectionality*

One of the main themes of the panel discussion addressed the concept of ‘gender’ itself and the importance of questioning how we understand gender in our work beyond the binaries of ‘women’ and ‘men’, moving towards nonbinary understandings of sex, gender, and the body that take into account the power relations and spatial practices that produce and work through these neat divisions. In other words, how can we advance with Butler’s (1990) suggestion to *trouble* the gender categories behind gender hierarchies and heteronormativity when it comes to the study of issues such as exclusionary landscapes and environmental politics? The panelists delved into the question of what kinds of gendered subjects are being constituted by the very material practices through which we see, understand, (re)produce, and transform the multiple and entangled environments we are part of.

Dianne spoke to this dynamic way of understanding gender and of incorporating it in our analysis in terms of the *gender kaleidoscope*:

DR: “[F]or me certainly right on the top of my plate is to get beyond men and women, to get beyond the binaries. We [Dianne Rocheleau, Barbara Thomas-Slayer, and Esther Wangari] said in the introduction to *Feminist Political Ecology* we were going to get beyond, but it was always about men and women and then we talked mostly 95% about women, so, we really need to get past that. I would say even get past the idea of a gender spectrum and into a sense of the gender kaleidoscope ... to get past essentialism, but also not to be afraid of affirmation. And we need to think that through, about [the] environment.”

Brigitte discussed this idea using the concept of *the evolution of gender*:

BB: “While I agree that we aren’t talking about men and women anymore, we still need to talk about them because they’re real and these categories exist in many ways. Probably we would like to talk about the evolution of gender, not just in social terms or in cultural terms but in personal ones ... With the idea of [a personal gender] transition, I always ask everybody: How is your transition? How are you building your gender, your ethnicity, your ‘any other category’, and how is it affecting the way you live in the world, the way you affect the world and the way you make decisions about what to do in the world?”

This interrogation of the constitution of gendered categories as they relate to and are informed by environments also engaged with theories of intersectionality and multiple forms of social difference (eg hooks, 1984; King, 1988; Mohanty, 1988). Recent feminist theories point to the need to understand gender in antiessentialist ways in terms of gendered roles, values, ideologies, and performances, and in terms of how gender cannot be understood in isolation from other constructed categories like race, caste, and ethnicity (Butler, 1990; hooks, 1995; Kobayashi and Peake, 1994; Valentine, 2007). Gender and environment theories try to follow this lead and also add to this the ways that gendered subjects are constituted through the environment and natures and our relations to the nonhuman (eg Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2006a; 2006b; Sultana, 2009b). As Andrea explained:

AN: “[G]ender is bound up in issues of ethnicity and other forms of social difference in really complex ways; [it] can’t be neatly separated from other forms of social difference. These intersections of other subjectivities mean that gender is not one issue: people are subjected by often competing but also colluding forms of social difference, and so our task becomes to explore the exercise of power and how forms of perceived social difference such as gender and race are enrolled at various dimensions of socionatures.”

The panelists agreed that actually bringing this perspective into gender and environment work is difficult to do.⁽⁴⁾ Some case studies clearly illustrate this intersectionality in relation to the entanglements of gender and ethnicity and the importance of understanding power relationally:

AN: “New meanings are ascribed to gender and to spaces and environments when women begin to inhabit spaces or environments that are normatively associated with men or vice versa, or with particular kinds of women and men. I think we need to continue to attend to how these achievements are quite contradictory; they often lead to only a partial realignment of the dominant exercise of power and depending on who’s doing it and how they are doing it, it may not lead to any realignment at all. It may actually lead to reinforcement of it.”⁽⁵⁾

In other cases, however, the connections between gender and other forms of difference may be less clear or contradictory, forcing researchers to identify one category as more prominent within a certain case study. Leila explained:

LH: “I’m definitely interested in men and women, different access to resources, different knowledge of resources and environments, and so forth, but I’m mainly interested in questions around the articulation of femininity and masculinity with respect to resources and environments, and especially how they change relationally over time and in relation to environmental change and so forth. ... [W]e say ‘gender and environment’; to me it’s good shorthand, but I always try to express very clearly that I’m really interested in social–spatial difference and environment, always asking questions about gender that are about other things too.”

The themes brought up by the panelists throughout their interventions regarding the complexities of using intersectionality in gender and environment work evolved into a discussion once the floor was opened for questions from the audience. Sharlene raised concerns that increased attention to intersectionality in gender and environment work is not enough, in terms of thoroughly addressing power dynamics and gender oppression. She lamented the lack of serious attention being paid to race and racism in the field, concerned that this inattention will leave our collective analyses of gender and environment issues “precariously incomplete”. She commented:

SM: “I expected gender and environment work to move towards seeing gender as a sort of short hand for all these other differences, but I’m not so sure it does that job Talking about intersectionality I think is really useful and certainly necessary, but I think it’s different than talking about racism and whiteness. I’m making the point that gender oppression is shaped through racial or caste oppression, but mapping out the way caste, racial, or other ethnic power actually operates in different places and how that shapes gendered subjects [pause] I think we could do better.”

Andrea responded:

AN: “That’s exactly the direction I’m going: thinking about those [processes of] boundary making and unmaking. How do subjects and social difference get bounded? ... What are the practices and processes both symbolic and material that are continually reproducing those things?”

⁽⁴⁾ This is not particular to the gender and environment field. As McCall (2005) notes, the expansion of the subject of study to include multiple dimensions of social differentiation and categorization that was introduced by the literature on intersectionality has posed new methodological challenges.

⁽⁵⁾ Andrea insisted on a more relational and contingent understanding of power: “We need to attend to the multidimensionality of power. In gender debates power is most often conceptualized in hierarchical metaphors of either oppression or empowerment, and I think that this kind of conceptualization fails to really capture the slippery nature of power and the way that acts of empowerment simultaneously serve to reinforce gender hierarchies.” See Rocheleau (2008) as well.

After other responses from panelists, Sharlene spoke to the complex relations between different forms of social differentiation and her belief that race and racism cannot “be separated from the production of gendered subjectivity”:

SM: “I’m totally perplexed by the ways in which gender becomes the primary difference, and I get it, I’m a woman, I’m a feminine woman, I’m a mother, but I’m also an African-Canadian, and that’s how I’m womaned.”

Leila’s response was:

LH: “Part of it has to do with context, I work in a place where it is more about ethnicity and gender perhaps than it is about racism ... that’s why I think it is important to historicize and contextualize practices and processes through which people access resources.”

Dianne’s response referred to how these historical and geographical specificities inform the focus of gender and environment work, and how this has an impact on the ways in which this kind of work is portrayed. Reflecting on how research on feminist political ecology often does not get labeled as such, and how it could be better understood as part of a more *rhizomatic* exchange instead of divided into neat disciplinary boxes, she said:

DR: “[A] lot of people who went out there to my great surprise to do theses in feminist political ecology, ended up, and me too, not taking gender as the primary unit of analysis. ... I think most of my students have gone off and found other elements of identity or affinity to be more focal in the work that they’re doing. That’s why it [feminist political ecology] ‘disappeared’, because we didn’t have the gender word under everything we did. So there are these feminist people out there all over the place, including me, who ... have gone on to emphasize other kinds of difference. Or to be in places where the keyword is going to be indigeneity, social movement, or environment and race.”

While this section reflects only a short excerpt of the full conversation, we feel that it illustrates some of the complexities and challenges that researchers face when moving between theory and practice, which we will take up again below. In terms of moving beyond men and women in gender and environment work, this conversation highlighted to us the importance of thinking through how we are invoking the category ‘gender’ in our own work. The discussion highlighted to us that understanding gender as constituted in particular ways in relation to particular environments and spaces necessarily entails an analysis of gender as intimately entangled with and never separate from other forms of social difference. Important therefore is the need to interrogate the ways in which concepts of class, race, and sexuality (among others) are *always* present within gender oppression as it intersects with other power dynamics, on a variety of scales, spaces, and contexts.

(ii) *Connecting scales, sites, and struggles*

The second major theme brought to light through the panel discussion was on the topic of connections. Taken broadly, this theme emerged often throughout the panel discussion and encapsulated connections between scales, sites, and struggles, calling for new and urgent ways of developing alliances across geographical and social difference. What was made clear throughout this aspect of the discussion was the complex and interrelated nature of the subjects, environments, and issues under study in the field, and the necessity to address gender and environment theory and practice from a perspective that privileges countertopographies and a politics of affinity.

Many of the panelists reminded the audience to keep in mind that *gender matters all the way through* as we move through different scales, as noted in much of the

existing gender and environment work (Elmhirst and Resurreccion, 2008; Rocheleau et al, 1996). In a sense, along with these panelists, this paper argues for a rescaling in the gender and environment literature to acknowledge the multiple ecologies that include habitat, home, household, and the body as much as the city, the region, the nation, and the globe. We want to note the ways that these are entangled in complex arrangements that can only be understood through their multi-sited and multiscalar character. While gender and environment work increasingly considers the multiscalar processes at stake in a way that challenges the global-versus-local binary (see Gibson-Graham, 2002; Pratt and Rosner, 2006), most of the work still seems to privilege the feminized scale of the local versus the masculinized scale of the global (see Freeman, 2001). As Andrea remarked:

AN: “I think there is a need to promote analyses of how gender matters at multiple scales. Say, if we start to understand gender as kind of emerging in and through the body and up to kind of global policy levels ... gender matters right the way through that whole spectrum [from the household to regional analysis or policy analysis]. ... As feminists we don’t want to move away from the household as that very important site wherein larger scale relations of power are produced, but nevertheless, I think that we have to keep pushing that message: It’s not just the household and community.”

In relation to this need to attend to the multiscalar character of gender and environment issues, Leila noted the importance of looking at the body as a site where global environmental issues are materialized. She emphasized the body as a necessary scale of analysis, following feminist theory, especially when it comes to the ability to examine environmental discourses or teach environmental studies using the intimate site of the body as a site of conflict or negotiation—for example, through issues like reproductive rights and the health impacts of toxic environments. Brigitte and Dianne both seconded this attention to environmental health, reproduction, and the body. Dianne asked the audience to question the liberal mindsets within which many of us often understand the body only as an individual phenomenon, in many ways limiting our understanding of its constitution through and in relation to others and the environment. As she said:

DR: “There’s also I think a different focal scale of self and I think that’s really hard for us [liberal subjects] because we think about freedom and autonomy, and we do have those liberal notions of ‘self’ and ‘the individual’ and ‘bounded self’ with hard rights and responsibilities. [It’s] about how we decide where the edge of ourselves is, if there’s just one or if we have many ... So there’s being embodied and taking on the body, but then there’s letting ourselves be aware of being in other bodies, including a watershed or a lake, or a living planet, but also being in ‘a people.’”

Following this exploration of scales of analysis and understanding by the panelists, another important aspect of the discussion revolved around the concept of connections between sites and struggles. Kiran and Farhana discussed these connections in terms of ‘speaking across’ perceived theory/practice divides and our roles and responsibilities as academics. These interventions are taken up in the next section.

Leila drew on Cindi Katz’s (2001; 2004; see also Pratt and Yeoh, 2003) concept of *countertopographies* to talk about how we can draw connections between seemingly distant places. She said:

LH: “[W]e have a lot of excellent examples of very grounded case studies; very nuanced, in-depth, embedded understandings of how these complexities unfold in a particular village in Nepal or Africa ... but we also need to be simultaneously thinking about the broader interconnections across sites, places, and power dynamics.

How is what's happening in this village affected by what's happening in the US or other sites? ... How can we think about these really contextual, important, relations and not let go of, but also be willing to talk about, the broader power dynamics and relationships ... especially [regarding] North–South divides?"

Dianne's view on the current state of gender and environment theory also drew strongly on themes of connection. For her, these connections are related to networked relationships between people, natures, and places and to the ecologies that interweave them. As she explains it:

DR: "[W]e need to think about the dynamic constitution between identity and affinity, or identities and affinities ... [I]t's crucial to question our own position, to situate ourselves and to situate those whom we would research with/about/for in entangled webs of power, in networks of power. And I would say the biggest challenge we face is how to put that into practice."

Dianne continued along these lines to define what such a *politics of affinity* would look like. Drawing from Sandra Harding's (1986) and Donna Haraway's (1991) work, she described how we can better understand and transform those fluid, embedded relations of power that interweave environments and subjects into complex, multisited, multiscaled ecologies:

DR: "I'm calling for what I'd like to call a *radical empiricism*. That is to radically insist on looking at the empirical fact of where we are and then where all of the others are that we selectively identify as mattering, and where they all are in relation to each other and in relation to other beings that they care about, or that they are connected to."

Andrea's comments on how gender and the environment are mutually constituted through spatial and embodied practices speak to this:

AN: "How is gender produced in embodied spatial practices that are firmly material but that carry very potent symbolic weight and, as they are materially enacted, the symbolic meanings themselves transform? ... I think that gender and environment work needs to remain embedded in material practice. And that sounds almost obvious, but I think that in social science and geography we are going away from things being terribly material and [being] specific about the materiality and physicality of space."

Comments by many panelists drew into this notion of connection the importance of ecologies and of human–nonhuman relations. Andrea and Leila, in particular, spoke to the relevance of these complex webs to our own constitution as gendered environmental subjects:

AN: "It's through affective relational interactions that transcend neat boundaries between the human and the nonhuman that people come to understand 'themselves' and come to be subjected in particular ways. ... How is it that we inhabit these quite contradictory relationships to those environments that quite often [we] care about or [we] need for survival?"

To this, Leila added:

LH: "I think we can make a bigger imprint at the intersection of questions [on subjectivity] with environmental concerns. I'm thinking about a lot of recent debates around environmental subjectivity. Some of the things that the literature hasn't been doing quite as well in that regard are questions of power and inequality, and even just bringing in feminist work. I think there is a lot more to be said in terms of subjectivity, identity, environmentalism, and politics."

In a more concrete example, Brigitte described exploring these embodied, complex webs of connection by taking students on fieldtrips to the countryside to do biological studies and asking them to think about their relationship with the parts

of the nonhuman world that they are engaging with—asking them questions such as: “how do you feel, what are you touching, with whom are you relating and how are you relating?” In relation to our embodied experiences as researchers, she said:

BB: “I would like to put on the table the idea of embodiment, of the experience of the body and how it is through this experience of the body that the senses change the way we relate to each other, to nonhuman and human beings, as a kind of permanent travel that allows us to read the scope, the full scope of the gender category?”

Leila’s insistence on addressing the scale of the body in gender and environment analysis also drew on these ideas of embodiment and connection. She argued for drawing affect and emotion further into gender and environment work to be able to look at human–environment relations and politics in terms of environmental subjectivities in a more grounded way:

LH: “Thinking about bodies and embodiment more, and really showing how that resonates, could be an important future intervention that we should push. How are bodies connected in terms of ecologies? [How] do these broader ideas around gender or inequalities affect our knowledge and understanding of environments? How do they affect the way in which different bodies live in and engage with environments?”

Overall, panelists insisted on the importance of looking at connections across scales, sites, and struggles in order to work through and theorize our own case studies and the types of connections that are or are not apparent in our work. The panelists theorized these connections for themselves, through concepts of webs, power dynamics, networks, bodies, ecologies, etc in ways that attempted to maintain complex and nuanced analyses of gender–environment relations while at the same time connecting these analyses to other scales, sites, or issues. The stress by many of the panelists on situating ourselves within our work and within these entangled, power-laden relations linked strongly to the discussions of the politics of knowledge production discussed below.

(iii) *Politics of knowledge production: theory as practice*

The third theme of the panel, the politics of knowledge production, included discussions around a perceived divide between theory and practice, our various responsibilities as academics and the academic politics of knowledge production. While differing opinions emerged as panelists tackled these contentious issues, the process was useful in delving into difficult ethical topics and in uncovering necessary questions that must be worked through as we each move forward with our work. The theme was introduced to the discussion by comments made by Joni as she responded to our panel question on the most important issues that need to be addressed in the field today. She stated:

JS: “I come first with a worry: we are really smart and nuanced about ‘capitalism’ and ‘the social production of nature’ and ‘the alienation from the natural world’ and ‘the perception of nature’ and the ‘sexuality spectrum’ and ‘semiotics’ and ‘identity’, and then you go to Mozambique to help them deal with climate change and all of that means relatively little. If the Minister of the Environment of Mozambique were sitting here she would most likely be distressed that this is what we are talking about in a gender and environment session. Not that intellectually it’s not of interest, not that there is no value in this theorizing, but it can seem enormously indulgent and in some ways imperialist to put theorizing at the front edge, to front load theorizing as our gender and environment agenda. ... I’ll reframe it as

a question: *to what extent do theoretical approaches to problems actually help us in the face of real-world, urgent environmental issues?*⁽⁶⁾

Along with worrying that theorizing might be indulgent in the face of “real-world, urgent environmental issues”, Joni elaborated her point with concerns about the evident lack of uptake of gender analysis when it comes to policy interventions on global environmental issues like climate change and our role as ‘experts’ in the gender and environment field:

JS: “In the climate change arena ... there is almost no take-up of gender analysis. It’s as though the last twenty years of our work glances off lightly. ... I think that [we have not been very successful] in terms of changing policy and in terms of influencing outcomes, in terms of changing the terms of discourse ... which makes me wonder, are we doing useful gender analysis? ... Is the problem *their* problem—that they are just being really stubborn and obstinate and strong headed—or is the problem *our* problem—that we haven’t made a case for the urgency and criticality of gender analysis in the realms of climate change?”

Directly addressing Joni’s comments, Kiran suggested that such concerns replicate a theory–practice binary. She pointed out that such a binary is taken as given rather than understood as a product of specific histories and geographies of knowledge production. These questions of how categories of analysis emerge are important because they help focus attention on how ‘gender’ and ‘environment’ emerge as objects of concern, study, and intervention. As Kiran stated, “[gender and environment] are not boxes that come filled, these are the boxes that we fill and in particular kinds of ways” and, we would add, in ways that have everything to do with the exercise of power. In that sense, Kiran argued for more, rather than less theory:

KA: “I think part of our task if we’re going to do work on gender and the environment right now is to do a very careful reading of what have been the subjects and objects of gender and environment theory *How have the subjects and objects of gender and environment theory been constituted?* And that includes the kind of binary articulations of ‘real world issues’ and ‘policy issues’, as well as ‘theory’ versus ‘real world problem-solving.’”

Joni’s concerns that gender analysis is lacking uptake when it comes to ‘urgent’ environmental issues reflects the grave dimensions of the current global environmental crisis and evidences that the gendered extent of disasters often goes unnoticed in popular media and public policy circles [see Hussain and Mustafa (2003), Lewis (2010), Seager (2006) for analysis of the gendered dimensions of disasters]. Indeed, gender is often obscured or backgrounded when discourses of urgency and crisis arise.⁽⁷⁾ That being said, other panelists warn that these powerful discourses of ‘urgency’ can be used to encourage immediate action and inquiry along ‘old’ lines that may essentialize people and spaces and replicate problematic power dynamics.

⁽⁶⁾ The concerns that Joni brought to our attention here were reflected in a conversation we had with a practitioner in the gender and environment field a week after the panel. She was in the midst of preparing an environmental strategy report for the World Bank on the state of gender and environment and was interested in the contents of the panel discussion. In an hour-long conversation with her we asked her the same question that we asked panelists. She commented that she finds the academic literature on gender and environment lacking in practical strategies in dealing with the issues she faces daily in her work, such as dealing with land tenure and property rights.

⁽⁷⁾ For example, this has been the case for the population crisis (Hartmann, 2001; Hartmann and Hendrixson, 2005) and the HIV/AIDS crisis (Foley and Hendrixson, 2009). The discourse on climate change is usually presented as class, race, and gender neutral too.

Kiran elaborated on what she meant by her call for more rather than less theory:

KA: “[I]t’s not sufficient to do reading and theorizing, but it is certainly absolutely necessary because ‘old’ kinds of formulations and analyses of ‘gender’ and ‘the environment’ are being reconstituted, I argue, and ‘old’—that is, Eurocentric, essentialist, imperialist, patriarchal, capitalist, or otherwise exploitative—relations are being replicated and reinforced in the name of ‘new’ and/or ‘urgent’ needs for interventions and pragmatic solutions. ... [P]art of what I’m suggesting is that we absolutely need to do this theoretical, critical work especially right now, in the moment of gender and the environment and climate change ... [when] old tropes in not-so-new bottles are being reinforced over and over again.”

During the group discussion, Andrea and Leila spoke to how theories are actually necessary for transforming real-world issues. For both of them, the importance of understanding the experience of being a gendered subject in relation to other axes of differentiation such as class and race exemplifies an instance where poor theory might translate into poor action:

AN: “It is crucial not to get stuck in the binary between theory and real world, but ... when we forget about intersectionality, when we forget the ways in which these complex subjectivities intersect, we end up at the policy level with incredibly problematic issues ... Theory does really matter on the ground!”

LH: “I think that maybe the Environment Minister [of Mozambique that Joni referred to] might know that there are gender impacts and it might be something that sounds theoretical or complicated, but you have to think about men and women, and about race, class, etc if you are going to have a plan that will actually work.”

This discussion of a perceived gap between practice and theory evolved into a broader discussion on the *responsibilities* that we have as academics interested in the field of gender and environment. This discussion was largely initiated by a comment by Kiran:

KA: “My principal point is that, as academics and intellectuals, avoiding the theoretical and reflexive work in the name of practice is absolutely evading our responsibility, negating our privilege, and building very spurious and partial alliances with real activists and subaltern subjects in the name of benevolence.”

Kiran later specified that the kind of responsibility she calls for is inspired by Gayatri Spivak’s essay (1994, page 27) by that same name. According to Spivak, being responsible means being cautious about “academic resistance to the acknowledgement of complicity” and about the ways in which ‘expert’ knowledges and interventions can “speak for the subaltern”. Commenting on this issue of responsibility raised by Kiran, Farhana said:

FS: “I agree it is really important to be able to make this constant intervention ... otherwise, what is our added value to this conversation? I think that’s the role we have to assume in our position of privilege within academia, that we do take these moments of knowledge, of critical theory, and careful reading and make them translatable.”

Expanding on the roles of academics, Farhana and Dianne both pointed to the ways in which their experiences as development practitioners and policy developers have influenced their reflexivity as researchers. Farhana emphasized her desire to speak ‘in multiple tongues’ across disciplines and perceived theory–practice divides to foster the kinds of conversations and interventions that are important. She spoke to the inherent contradictions in these responsibilities to do the theoretical work and yet work towards the transformation of the social realities we study, and emphasized the autobiographical nature of our work:

FS: “I think that we do the kinds of work we do and the kinds of research that pull us into those kinds of questions because of our sense of responsibility. And often that is about our lived experiences, it’s about our own embodied subjectivities or different processes and encounters that we’ve come across.”

While the debate about the difficulties of connecting work across ‘languages’, sites, and scales is an ongoing and crucial aspect of our work as gender and environment researchers (and geographers), another aspect of the politics of knowledge production was also added to the discussion—that of the politics of academia. As feminist scholars many of the panelists are concerned with the quantitative and reductionist model with which ‘progress’ in our chosen careers is measured (see *Antipode* 2000), as if this collaboration and “springboarding” (using Leila’s term) off of each other’s ideas is nonexistent and as if we’ve been “theorizing in vacuums” (as Andrea put it).

Along with our diverse and various responsibilities to theorize, inform policy, engage with difficult concepts and debates, and question the very political character of the knowledge we produce, the panel also recognized our responsibility to each other, in terms of collaborating on ideas and projects, supporting each other’s work and acknowledging the insightful work of past scholars who have influenced our thinking in numerous critical ways: to do more thinking *with*. Leila stated:

LH: “As feminist political ecologists and others who work on these things, I think we could actually do a lot better to rethink and counter some of the practices in the academy around knowledge production and authorship and some of those core questions. Here, I think, could probably be a space where we are forging important intellectual coalitions, thinking in more creative ways about how to deal with some of those questions and these are real challenges in the academy?”

So as scholars in the field of gender and environment trying to engage individually and collectively with practice and theory, and trying to reflexively work on building affinities and connections across scales, sites, and goals, where do we go from here? Farhana discussed her idea that we each do different kinds of work:

FS: “What are the ways that we can push these debates forward given that all of us have highlighted all the different ways ... in more theoretical ways, or in practice, or from more personalized embodied subjectivities that we inhabit in multiple worlds? ... It’s a question of how do we take these kinds of nuanced analyses and value the theoretical messages that we learn and acquire, and then go make the change and be the change you want to see.”

This discussion on the politics of knowledge production highlighted, more than the other themes, various tensions between the ways in which the panelists understand and work with gender and environment relations. What this discussion demonstrated was the importance of coming together and talking through these issues, understanding that each of us works in particular ways on particular issues, but simultaneously collectively in the sense that attention must be paid to the connections discussed in the above section. We take the concerns raised by Joni and the various responses very seriously as we think through what it means to theorize and practice under the gender and environment umbrella. While we see the theory and practice division as a political and arbitrary one, we believe that thinking about these articulations of theory and practice and working through them is fundamental in our work. Understanding theory and practice as dialectically related in which we (as academics) inhabit the contradictions, we see ourselves as responsible for doing better theory because we need better practices. Reflecting, in collaboration, on this responsibility that we embody as academics was extremely useful to us and is a task that must continue as we proceed

with our own work. As junior scholars ourselves, the concerns raised over the academic politics of knowledge production and the ways that those politics can stifle collaborative work and affinities are of particular interest to us. A commitment to working and writing *with* is something we take seriously, and this paper in many ways is intended to demonstrate that commitment.

Conclusion: future directions

We believe that the insights made throughout this panel discussion do exceptional work of describing the current state of the loosely defined field of gender and environment and in pushing the boundaries of this field, suggesting interesting and important directions that our work must take in the future. Panelists pointed out the impossibility of looking at gender alone in relation to the environment and highlighted the importance of understanding gender as fluid and as intersectionally connected to other forms of difference through various power dynamics that are often deeply informed by, and themselves inform, spaces and natures. The panel discussion returned again and again to themes of connection among scales, sites and struggles and the many possibilities that thinking through these entangled networks can provide for collaboration and for developing new theories and practices. Finally, the panel took on the difficult task of discussing the politics of knowledge production, our own roles as researchers within these power dynamics, and possible ways that we can attend to, but not become paralyzed by, this theory–practice divide. Panelists encouraged both more practical application of gender and environment work in the field and more engagement with feminist, postcolonial, ecological, and geographic theories in order to develop our work in a variety of diverse and useful ways.

For us as editors and panel organizers, this discussion reinforced some of our own ideas about the desired directions of the field. We believe that there is a need to interrogate how the categories of gender and environment and their relationship to one another are constituted, particularly as these constitutions relate to local–global power dynamics and systems of neoliberalism, racism, sexism, and other oppressive politics of difference. We are especially interested in looking at how these dynamic categories have been produced differently in relation to the North and the South. In doing this we hope to demonstrate how global power dynamics play out on and are affected by intimate scales, like the body. Roberta's work looks at the connections between issues across this apparent North–South divide by investigating how 'green households' and ethical consumption in the North are intimately related to issues of environmental justice and resource access in the South. Diana's work seeks to better understand how global discourses of paradisiacal natures to be protected for tourism actually contribute to deepening the gendered and raced imagined geographies of North and South.

In addition to this, we would like to see more work on the gendered character of the entangled processes of the production of nature and subjectification/subjectation as this relates to gendered roles, landscapes, bodies, livelihood strategies, etc. We are interested in the production of gendered environments and the gendered subjectivities they produce. Drawing from the great work laid out in this panel, we would like to see more research that closely looks at the connections among gendered, class-based, and racialized processes of differentiation, exclusion, and domination as this relates to global environmental issues, resource politics, and environmental citizenship. Finally, we would like to see further exploration of the politics of affinity within gender and environment work, focusing on ideas of collaboration and alliances and drawing on work in feminist geography around these issues (Katz, 2001; Massey, 2004; Pratt, 2004; Pratt and Yeoh, 2003). Overall, our hope in assembling this conversation here is that it will spark a continued discussion of these issues within gender and environment theory

and practice and encourage debate, collaboration, and reflection as we move into the future.

Roberta Hawkins, Diana Ojeda (Editors)

Kiran Asher, Brigitte Baptiste, Leila Harris, Sharlene Mollett, Andrea Nightingale, Dianne Rocheleau, Joni Seager, Farhana Sultana (Contributors)

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