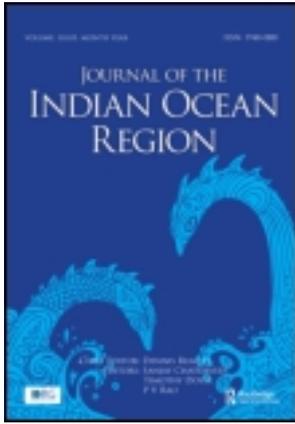


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Sherilyn MacGregor^a

^a Research Centre for the Study of Politics, International Relations and Environment, Keele University, Keele, UK

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‘Gender and climate change’: from impacts to discourses

Sherilyn MacGregor*

*Research Centre for the Study of Politics, International Relations and Environment,
Keele University, Keele, UK*

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Whereas the concepts of class, poverty and race make regular appearances in social scientific analyses of global climate change, the same cannot be said for gender. A survey of the academic literature suggests that there is a lack of research into the many gender dimensions of climate change. The small amount of gender-sensitive work that exists has been carried out by gender, environment and development (GED) researchers working for the UN and non-governmental organisations who focus almost exclusively on the material impacts of climate change on vulnerable women in the Global South. In this paper I make two arguments about the current state of research on gender and climate change. First, I argue that although the GED research makes many important contributions to our understanding of the politics of climate change, it also contributes to an unnecessarily narrow understanding of gender, a fixation on ‘impacts’ that are material and measurable, and the view of women in the developing world, particularly those living in countries of the Indian Ocean Region, as victims of ecological crisis. Second, in response to these shortcomings, I argue for the development of a deeper gender analysis where materialist-informed empirical research on women is complemented by critical feminist theorising of the discursive constructions and categories that shape climate politics today.

Keywords: gender; climate change; climate politics; feminist constructivism; discourse

1. Introduction

With each new book, journal, policy report and conference programme devoted to climate politics comes the inevitable questions: Where are the women?, and, Where is the gender analysis? Even after more than 20 years of feminist intervention in the fields of politics and international relations of the environment, the omission of gender remains the rule rather than the exception. In recent studies of climate justice, the analysis of capitalist and colonial relations of inequality are given welcome attention, serving to challenge a westernised, Eurocentric environmentalism that has dominated for too long. However, there remains a curious silence on gender relations in the mainstream literature and policy discourse – curious because this is a time when one need only type the words ‘women and climate change’ into *Google* to learn that all over the world there is a growing recognition that climate change is

*Email: s.macgregor@pol.keele.ac.uk

disproportionately hurting women and girls, particularly in developing countries of the Global South.

It is common to hear that climate change presents a host of national and global challenges, from restructuring political institutions, to rearranging economic and spatial relations, to devoting vast resources towards new forms of regulation, mitigation and adaptation. The precise kinds of challenges that climate change may present for gender politics is less certain and much less discussed. The concept of gender is largely absent in policy documents and research reports on climate change. The small amount of work that has been done so far has focused almost exclusively on the material impacts of climate change on women in the Global South and has neglected to place equal emphasis on the gendered power relations and discursive framings that shape *climate politics*. In what follows, my aim is to redress the inadequacies of current research in a way that constructively challenges rather than accepts or retrenches conventional approaches. To do this I first consider the themes and shortcomings of the existing research on gender and climate change. I then look beyond the narrow focus on material impacts to the dominant institutional and societal discourses which configure those impacts and formulate the agenda for their mitigation. Here I am interested in gender not as a synonym for women but in terms of hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity. (The concept of gender is widely understood in the social sciences as a social construction, different from biological sex, which determines people's roles and identities as masculine or feminine.) I want to examine how dominant discourses effectively frame the climate change debate as a scientific, gender neutral problem, and thus obscure the fact that it has significant gendered dimensions. An analysis of how these discourses emerge from and work to perpetuate prevailing gender roles and relations is useful in exposing the sets of unquestioned assumptions that inform the climate change debate.

2. Research on gender and climate change: silences, themes, shortcomings

It is not controversial to begin by stating that there is a lack of research on gender and climate change. Neither is it controversial to note that there is a well-documented case of gender blindness in the environmental fields in general (Banerjee and Bell 2007). There has also been an almost total avoidance of environmental issues by Western feminist academics in recent years (I discuss this point elsewhere; see MacGregor 2010). The small amount of research that exists on gender and climate change has been conducted by gender, environment and development (GED) scholars and by feminists working for United Nations (UN) and government agencies such as the UN Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the UN Environment Program (UNEP). Women's environmental organisations, mostly based in the North, are also involved in conducting research in conjunction with their campaigns for the greater awareness of the impacts of climate change on women around the world. Notable examples include the Women's Environment and Development Organisation (WEDO), the Global Gender and Climate Alliance, the German women's non-governmental organisation (NGO) Genanet, and the EU-based GenderCC Women for Climate Justice. Many international development NGOs, such as Oxfam and ActionAid, have recently launched projects aimed at bringing attention to the gender-specific plight of women affected by climate change-related flooding, particularly in South Asian countries. This research is largely aimed at policymakers

and development workers and therefore focuses on the measurable impacts and potential solutions to a range of problems that climate change will cause – and is causing now – for the world's women.

Most of the academic articles that exist on gender and climate change appear in two special issues of the journal *Gender and Development* published in July 2002 and March 2009. (There are a handful of others, and no doubt more before this article goes to print). The articles in the special issues are written from a development policy and practice perspective. There are gestures toward feminist and political theory (feminist political ecology in particular – see Rocheleau *et al.* 1996), but the work is primarily aimed at development-related issues and takes a materialist approach. The impetus for the special issues is the lack of attention to gender in climate change research. To make the case, Skutsch (2002, p. 30) conducted 'a scan of a number of prominent journals dedicated to the climate issue [which] reveals not a single article on the gender-differentiated implications of climate change in recent years.' She also notes that neither the Kyoto Protocol nor the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change actually mention the words 'gender' or 'women'. There is a consensus among the contributors to the 2002 *Gender and Development* issue that the gender dimensions of climate change have been neglected by policymakers. Not much appears to have changed since 2002. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the main source of climate science and policy research upon which governments around the world rely when setting national targets and making policies to address climate change. In the 52-page general synthesis of its Fourth Assessment Report *Climate Change 2007* there is one mention of women (relating to the potential benefits for rural women in the Global South of a switch to cleaner energy sources) and no mention of gender (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2007). In the three Working Group reports attached to the main Assessment, women are mentioned just once when listing the Millennium Development Goals, and gender is mentioned a few times in reference to the articles in the 2002 climate change issue of the journal *Gender and Development*.

At the very highest levels, then, climate change is cast as a human crisis in which gender has no relevance. The situation gradually has been changing due to the efforts of women's activist organisations and development NGOs mentioned above. An international network has formed in the past few years with the purpose of correcting the invisibility of gender issues with the slogan 'no climate justice without gender justice' at conferences such as those in Bali in 2008 and Copenhagen in 2009. They have worked tirelessly to put gender on the agenda and to get the word 'gender' into the policy documents. However, as Geraldine Terry (2009, p. 5; emphasis added) writes in her opening commentary to the 2009 issue, 'academics, gender and development practitioners, and women's rights advocates *are still only starting to grapple* with [the] many gender dimensions [of climate change]'. She makes the important point that unless greater attention is given to these dimensions, policies aimed at mitigation and adaptation may well exacerbate the hardships of already disadvantaged women in North and South.

Gendered impacts of climate change

The overarching theme in gender and climate change research is that climate change is not gender-neutral but has gender-differentiated causes and effects. The main

arguments are not only that climate change will be experienced by men and women differently, but also that women will be more severely hurt by the impacts than men. GED scholars have been claiming for decades that women are more dramatically affected by all forms of environmental degradation than men due to their social roles as carers and provisioners and in their social location as the poorest and most vulnerable at the bottom of social hierarchy, alongside children. Climate change is no different, and the articles in the special issues of *Gender and Development* give concrete evidence of gender-differentiated impacts. For example, there is a strong correlation between gender inequalities and women's survival rate in natural disasters such as typhoons, droughts and floods. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that women are up to 14 times more likely than men to die as a result of natural disasters (World Health Organisation 2003; research by Neumayer and Plümper 2007 generally concurs). Moreover, there is evidence that women's everyday caring and provisioning work will be made more difficult due to climatic changes: they may have to travel further for clean water and firewood and spend more time trying to grow and gather foodstuffs in inhospitable conditions (Goldsworthy 2010). And when households experience food shortages, which are an inevitable consequence of climate change, women tend to go without so that their children may eat – at great cost to their own health (Cannon 2002).

Drawing on specific case studies from developing countries, the contributors to the special issues show how economic and social breakdown caused by displacement will bring about a worsening of women's already low status and vulnerability. Women make up 70% of the world's poor. They are 80% of the world's refugees and thus are expected to make up the majority of people displaced by climate change (UNIFEM n.d.). Displaced women living on the move or in camps are the main targets of sexual violence, a situation that, according to UNIFEM, is inadequately addressed by governments and international aid agencies. Women who have not been displaced as refugees are likely to be left behind when male family members migrate, and so bear a disproportionate responsibility for caring for and managing the survival of their families on their own. Their poverty and low social status also makes it less likely that women will be involved in decision-making. All of this indicates that people who are more socially and economically marginalised are more vulnerable to the detrimental effects of global warming. The IPCC accepts this equation by saying that those with the least resources are the most vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change (Dankelman 2002, p. 22).

Shortcomings of the 'impacts' approach

Although the current body of gender and climate change research provides a much needed antidote to gender-blindness in the dominant policy and academic arenas, there are some inevitable shortcomings. Several of these, it must be acknowledged, are the unavoidable results of prioritising the urgent needs of women in impoverished local places over the longer-term feminist political goal of challenging patriarchal discourses and structures. I list four shortcomings here, not to criticise unfairly but to draw attention to the issues that I believe need further critical attention by feminist environmental scholars if we are to break out of our marginalised place in the field and contribute in more productive ways to the climate debate. As a feminist researcher based in the 'over-developed,' affluent world, I find it important always to

be mindful that academic work can contribute to the silencing and misrepresentation of people in the developing world, despite our best intentions.

The first shortcoming is that the focus is almost exclusively on climate change in relation to very particular kinds of women: women in developing countries of the Global South. Fourteen out of 20 articles in the two *Gender and Development* special issues focus on the gendered impacts of and responses to climate change in developing countries, several of which are in the Indian Ocean Region (India, Bangladesh, Tanzania). There are no case studies from the affluent, over-developed world. This is to be expected, given that the main ‘protagonists’ of the GED field are rural women in the so-called developing world. However, although there is an expressed editorial wish to steer clear of ‘victim-talk’, and a few examples of women’s climate change activism, the dominant theme in the journals is Southern women’s vulnerability to harm. The most frequent co-location of words in the gender and climate change research is undoubtedly ‘women’ and ‘vulnerable’. Readers may also be aware that the iconic climate victim imagery used in the popular media tends to be a lone South Asian woman standing chest-high in rising flood waters. These images and portraits are problematic, I would argue, because the result is that rural women in the South are constructed as one-dimensional objects: they rarely enter the discussion unless as climate victims (but see below for two others). By focusing on vulnerability, there is a danger of affirming the negative stereotype (perpetuated by the media in the North) of the Southern woman as helpless, voiceless and largely unable to cope without the help of UN development agencies funded and staffed by the North. Meanwhile, it perpetuates the idea that environmental problems like climate change are problems for ‘them’ and not for ‘us’ – a similar misconception that has plagued sustainable development discourse for more than 20 years.

Second, in the impact-focused research there appears to be an uncritical acceptance of the scientific framing of climate change and positivist approaches to understanding and managing its inevitable consequences. There is an under-theorised belief that if ‘impacts’ can be measured and victims counted, then the ‘gender and climate change’ case will be made. Finding empirical proof of women’s greater level of vulnerability and hardship seems to be one of the main goals of the research. Given that the researchers are in the business of problem solving and ‘development’, such goals are probably unquestioned. For example in the 2009 special issue, Ahmed and Fajber (2009, p. 37) advocate various methods for ‘vulnerability assessment’ and ‘vulnerability mapping’ in Gujarat, India: ‘ideally’, they write, ‘research into vulnerability should include both a qualitative understanding of the context, and a quantitative assessment, based on well-defined indicators’. They go on to explain their Vulnerability Capacity Index (VCI), which is ‘a simple quantitative index based on 11 “drivers of vulnerability” . . . [where] scores are attached to the different indicators, and three dimensions of vulnerability are then weighed to come up with a composite score’ (Ahmed and Fajber 2009, p. 37). My concern here is that amid all of this positivism, there is very little room for human voices – let alone the voices of those women who would wish to complicate or resist the way they appear in the climate story. Only a few of the articles in the special issues include direct quotes from the vulnerable women who are the objects of their concern, and I know of no research to date that considers the discursive dimensions of climate change from a feminist or gender-sensitive perspective.

The third shortcoming points to the old ‘women versus gender’ debate that has long framed feminist interventions in the field of politics and international relations. Rather than theorising gender as a social and political relationship between people with masculine and feminine identities, most analyses of gender and climate change fall into the familiar trap that *gender-means-women*. By this I mean that although purporting to be conducting a gender analysis, there is a singular focus on women and little or no mention of men (who are also gendered beings) – other than as relatively less vulnerable and more culpable than women. The problem here is that, as Bretherton (1998, p. 86) notes, women’s experiences and behaviours are seen in ‘isolation from the broader socio-cultural content in which . . . norms are embedded’ so there is reduced chance of understanding the gender relational aspects of climate politics, particularly those which are shaped by inequalities of power and access to resources. There are also problems of reinforcing the idea that there are special woman-environment links on the basis of biological sex and of presenting women as one monolithic group, thereby obscuring differences among women (Bretherton 1998, p. 90).

Fourth, the impacts approach treats the environment in an instrumental way that may run counter to the basic philosophical ideas that inform a radical (as opposed to reformist) approach to environmental politics. There seems to be no reason given for doing gender-based, feminist research into climate change other than *because it will hurt women*. The environment is presented as an increasingly scarce resource, a threat and an enemy – something to be feared and controlled rather than embraced and protected as indivisible from human life (Doyle and Chaturvedi 2010). Worryingly, this is more consistent with neoliberal than feminist or green values. Absent is a normative position on the human exploitation of the planet or the intrinsic value of the non-human world, a position that arguably should be central to any critical eco-political analysis. Without a normative position, it will be difficult to challenge the root causes of the climate crisis and so GED researchers will continue to find themselves responding to the symptoms rather than work towards (something at least moving in the direction of) a ‘cure’ for global environmental destruction.

3. The gendered discourses of climate change: toward a feminist constructivist analysis

Having discussed the main themes and shortcomings of the available research on gender and climate change, I now want to examine the issue through a different lens. Thus far, it has been a shortcoming of gender and climate change research that little thought seems to have been given to the cultural and symbolic (that is, ideational) dimensions of climate change or to the ways in which gendered environmental discourses frame and shape dominant understandings of the issue. I start from the position that gender is not just an empirical category or identity (male/female), but it is also a discursive, social construction that organises the world. It is a concept that ‘structurally organises . . . virtually every aspect of social life in all cultures’ (Peterson and Runyan 1999, p. 31). I would argue that gender analysis and the study of gender politics should involve the analysis of power relations between men and women and the discursive and social constructions of hegemonic masculinities and femininities that shape the way we interpret, debate, articulate and respond to social/natural/technological phenomena like war, economic crisis and climate change. This is not to

treat climate change as a mere 'current event' or to downplay its seriousness. It is an approach that allows us to examine critically the contemporary climate debate to see what the responses to climate change tell us about the current state of gender politics and what impact the unfolding crisis is having (or is not having) on gender relations. The lens of gender politics brings into acute focus the processes, norms and power relations through which we can recognise the workings of hegemonic masculinities and hegemonic femininities in all social phenomena (Peterson and Runyan 1999). Hegemonic masculinities and femininities are the particular discursive conceptualisations of maleness and femaleness that are 'dominant in a given set of gender relations at a particular time; and in relation to which other conceptualisations are seen as subordinated, marginalised or complicit (Bretherton 2003, p. 104). A question that arises from this approach is: what are the implications of gendered assumptions about men and women in and for the climate change debate?

In addition to taking this feminist constructivist approach to gender analysis, I also want to apply a discourse lens to the issue to uncover the role of gender in shaping 'the dialogue between power and knowledge found in the social construction of climate change' (Pettenger 2007a, p. 1). Here I draw on a constructivist approach within the politics and international relations fields as a way to challenge both the positivist assumptions found in dominant discourse (that some gender advocates also seem to accept) and to identify the complex interconnections of material and ideational factors (Pettenger 2007b). Climate change may be 'real' and have material manifestations, but it is also being shaped by social and cultural norms and discourses. Epstein (2008, p. 8), who is well known for her use of a discourse lens in environmental politics, explains that a discourse is 'a cohesive ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorisations about a specific object that frame that object in a certain way, and therefore delimit the possibilities for acting in relation to it' (see also Dryzek 2005). Taking a critical look at discourses allows us to understand how people 'make sense of themselves, of their interests and their ways of behaving, and of the world around them' (Epstein 2008, p. 7).

In the affluent world, climate change has been shaped by a number of hegemonic discourses, each of which works to set the global policy agenda and inform local experiences and understandings. For example, the discourse of ecological modernisation puts science and economics together for a win-win solution to all that climate changes threatens to bring. There is also the discourse of environmental security, which casts climate change as a serious threat requiring militarised responses. Both of these discourses favour top-down approaches and implicate powerful institutions in their realisation. Moving in the opposite direction, from the individual up, are the discourses of green duty (also known as environmental behaviour change) and neo-Malthusian population control (see MacGregor 2009). Interestingly, these two pairs of discourses map neatly on to hegemonic gender roles and stereotypes, with science and security lining up on the side of masculinity and individual duty and reproduction linking up with femininity. A feminist interrogation of how these dominant discourses frame and construct the politics of climate change are gendered seems to be an important addition to – and perhaps as a corrective to – the existing 'gender impacts' research. I provide a brief overview of each set of gendered climate discourses below.

The masculinisation of environmental politics? Discourses of science and security

During the 1980s and 1990s, when dominant environmental concerns were issues of health, anti-militarism, right livelihood, biodiversity and resistance to 'maldevelopment' (Mies and Shiva 1993), women were prominent activists in the global environmental movement. Key iconic figures included the women activists of Greenham Common (protesting cruise missiles in the UK), Clayoquot Sound (protesting the clear cutting of old growth forests on the west coast of Canada) and Chipko (saving trees from the axe in India), along with individual environmental leaders such as Lois Gibbs, Petra Kelly, Vandana Shiva, Medha Patkar and Wangari Maathai. However, since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the growing attention to climate change has been accompanied by a relocation of the centre of environmental debate and action to within (rather than outside) the scientific and policymaking institutions. This has brought men to the fore as policy experts, scientists, political advocates, entrepreneurs, commentators and celebrities. One could say that the rise of climate change to the top of the green agenda has brought about an apparent 'masculinisation' of environmental politics.

Men far outnumber women in scientific and decision-making organisations that have responsibility for addressing the climate crisis. The IPCC is mostly made up of male scientists (only 16% are women). International environmental delegations are mostly made up of and led by men (Dankleman 2002). For example, of the 146 national delegations participating at the recent UN Climate Summit in New York in September 2009, seven were headed by women. The new UN climate financing group announced in March 2010 (co-chaired by Gordon Brown and Meles Zenawi) is made up of an equal number of representatives from Annex I and Annex II countries, yet all 19 members are men. The most prominent political and celebrity climate change spokespeople are male (think Nicholas Stern, Al Gore, Rajendra Pachauri, etc.) (see Nielson Company 2007) and women are a small minority in fields (science, engineering, economics) that have influence over climate change policymaking. It is not just a matter of the numbers of men and women sitting at the table or working in the lab: I would argue that the climate politics has been shaped by stereotypically masculinist discourses that work to 'invisibilise' and alienate women and their concerns. This exclusionary process can operate in scientific institutions, policy circles, in the media and in society at large. Two stereotypically masculinist discourses I have in mind are ecological modernisation and environmental security.

Climate change is widely represented as a techno-scientific problem requiring technical solutions. Part of the reason that gender has been irrelevant is that, framed as a global problem by scientists, it is assumed to affect all humans on earth equally (Doyle and Chaturvedi 2010). An article in the *New Scientist* (2007) confirms this assumption by making fun of a feminist report commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Environment that shows the gender differences in the causes and consequences of global warming (Johnsson-Latham 2007). 'Men to blame for global warming' and 'Even climate change can't escape the gender wars' went the headlines, in an attempt to portray the research claims as plainly ridiculous.

The scientific framing of climate change has been achieved in large part through the discourse of ecological modernisation (EM) that has become dominant in the UK and Europe and is catching hold in the USA. Simply put, EM advocates the use of 'technological advancement to bring about [both] better environmental

performance' and economic efficiency in a win-win situation (Schlosberg and Rinfret 2008, p. 256). Moving beyond the notion of 'sustainable development', EM has a supply side focus and depends on cooperation among (male dominated) governments, science and business to solve environmental problems (Hajer 1995). Climate change represents a welcome opportunity for this worldview; it provides a serious global problem to solve through the wise partnering of techno-innovators and brave capitalists. Thus the crisis has brought about the development of all sorts of technical fixes that are economically lucrative and therefore apparently win-win, such as carbon capture and storage, carbon sequestration, renewable energy (wind, solar, wave and geothermal power, bio-fuels), genetically modified crops, geo-engineering, and the list could go on. While many of these innovations may prove necessary for a sustainable future, the EM approach advocates more technology and more development rather than more precaution and more humility about the limits and costs of human ingenuity. It is worth noting here that not only have the issues that women traditionally organise around (such as environmental health, habitats and livelihoods) been marginalised by the climate agenda, but the scientised framings of climate change as a political issues exclude women. Reflecting on her experience of high-level climate meetings, Ulrike Rohr, director of the German gender and environment project Genanet, attributes women's lack of participation to the exclusively scientific approach to climate. 'Women feel like they can't enter the discussions' she says (quoted in Stoparic 2006).

Environmental security (ES) is the other dominant discourse that works to frame contemporary climate politics. While there is debate over its meaning, in its most dominant form it is a discourse that takes up Hobbesian predictions that climate change will inevitably lead to conflict over scarce resources between and within states (Homer-Dixon 1999). Since the early 1990s, defence ministries (traditionally the domain of men) have been interpreting environmental 'insecurities' in ways that call for armed and militaristic readiness, alliances and responses (Elliott 2004). Some scholars have warned against this 'securitising' move, arguing that it is contrary to the cooperation that is necessary on this shared planet and forgets the lessons of past wars and the environmental devastation caused by militarism. Some have said that environmentalism should stick with its core concerns for health, nature, and future generations rather than don the 'blood soaked garments of war' (Deudney 1990 in Schlosberg and Rinfret 2008, p. 262). However, such warnings have not been heeded by people in power and there has been growing interest in recent years in presenting climate change as a serious threat to national and global security. It is common to hear statements to the effect that climate change is a worse threat than terrorism (Connor 2004). Ironically, the environment was once considered a 'soft politics' issue in the field of international relations, far removed from the 'hard' political issues of security and military affairs (Peterson and Runyan 1999, pp. 59–60). Now environment has become 'hardened' by the threats to national and international order that climate change is predicted to bring its wake (e.g. mass movement of climate refugees from South to North). By securitising and militarising it, the environmental crisis becomes a problem that requires technical, diplomatic and military solutions, entirely consistent with hegemonic (hyper)masculinity.

Highlighting the ways in which the securitising discourse is gendered (that is, masculine), some feminists have argued that women have tended to focus on the cooperative rather than conflictual dimensions of the problem, in such issues

as sustainable lifestyles, ethical consumption and the precautionary principle (Johnsson-Latham 2007, p. 6). WEDO embraces the concept of 'human security' as distinct from environmental security and including such issues as the security of individuals, their access to food and shelter, and their human rights as more reflective of women's than men's concerns (Dankelman *et al.* 2008, p. 2). Although the academic literature on environmental security does not necessarily make this connection (for an exception see Goldsworthy 2010), WEDO believes that human security reflects a stereotypically feminine set of concerns – and that these are more ethically and socially relevant concerns than those that seem to capture the attention of people in power. This is the position taken by the contributors to the 2002 climate change issues of *Gender and Development*. For example, Masika (2002, p. 3) writes: 'Predominant approaches and policy responses have focused on scientific and technological measures to tackle climate change problems. They have displayed scant regard for the social implications of climate change outcomes and the threats these pose for poor men and women, or for the ways in which people's political and economic environments influence their ability to respond to the challenges of climate change.' From this perspective, the twin discourses of ecological modernisation and environmental security represent 'more of the same' gender politics and threaten to intensify the underlying causes of climate change.

Victim, saviour or culprit? Discursive categorisation of women in climate politics

In an article published many years ago in the *Review of International Politics*, feminist international relations scholar Charlotte Bretherton (1998, p. 87) argues that perceptions of the links between women and environmental issues have tended to fall into three discursive categories: women as victims, saviours and 'the problem'. Each of these positions serves to reinforce sexist ideas about women and has particular implications for policy and development work. Bretherton suggests that it is difficult to escape these categories when the focus of feminist environmental research is 'women' rather than *gender relations*, which is why she stresses the importance of rethinking the ways in which feminists attempt to put gender on the agenda of global environmental politics. Similar points can be made (12 years later) about the current context/contours of climate politics, which have been framed by two further dominant discourses: individualised green duty and populationism.

I discussed the labelling of women as vulnerable victims of climate change above. It is worth noting here that 'woman as victim' is a discursive trap that even those who wish to advocate on behalf of the rights and interests of women may unwittingly fall into. It is a similar problem to how development NGOs find themselves using the 'climate refugee' label in a way that not only ends up becoming naturalised (and unquestioned) but also in a way that many people who have been given the label want actively to resist (for a discussion of this problem see McNamara and Gibson 2009).

With respect to seeing women as 'saviours', it is a paradox of the climate change debate that women are absent and alienated from it at the same time as being increasingly implicated in its solution. In the North and the South, women are often presented as saviours who will use their special knowledge of the natural world (for example, through farming and other subsistence labour) or their sense of duty to care for others to help vulnerable communities adapt to climate change. While the masculinist EM discourse focuses on the supply side, and technical solutions and ES

focus on militaristic ‘muscle-flexing’ (Denton 2002, p. 18), there is a parallel feminising discourse that places the onus on individuals as carers, consumers and provisioners to take responsibility for reducing the environmentally harmful impacts of contemporary life. Governments and environmentalists in the affluent world place emphasis on the role of individuals as consumers to tackle climate change by conserving energy, recycling waste, growing food and foregoing flights. Few recognise that insofar as most of these domestic activities they will largely be performed by women.

There is a longstanding feminist critique of environmental politics that says it pays insufficient attention to the politics of gender in general and the gender division of labour in particular. I have written about the lack of attention to women’s ‘life-sustaining labour’ elsewhere (MacGregor 2006), as have other feminist environmental scholars who analyse the importance of social reproduction for environmental sustainability (Littig 2002). Giovanna Di Chiro (2008, p. 281) gives a useful definition of social reproduction as ‘the intersecting complex of political–economic, socio-cultural, and material–environmental processes required to maintain everyday life and sustain human cultures and communities on a daily basis and intergenerationally’. She notes that social reproduction, a feminised sphere of activity, has been ‘ignored or trivialised’ in mainstream (that is, non-feminist) scholarship, even though it has been affected in important ways by neoliberal capitalist globalisation and ecological degradation. Because women’s responsibility for social reproduction is *assumed-yet-ignored*, no one stops to raise questions of equity and fairness in environmental change agenda that depends on it.

There are of course differences between the way women’s association with (and responsibility for) social reproduction plays out in the North and the South. In the Global South, according to GED researchers, gender politics have been manifested in development programmes that are explicitly designed to be carried out by unpaid women volunteers, based on the assumption that rural women are predisposed to taking an environmental care-tending role. There are many celebrated examples of women’s ‘self-help’ contributions to climate change adaptation, such as the collectives of Dalit women farmers in Zaheerabad, India, who are using a system of dry land agriculture to produce organic staple crops in poor conditions (Acharya 2009), or the women’s community gardens that ensure food security in times of flooding in the Salima district of Malawi (ActionAid 2008). However, in spite of some of the tangible benefits to women and their communities, the assumption of women’s role as selfless ‘earthcarers’, writes Maskia (2002, p. 6) ‘continue[s] to translate into initiatives that place greater burdens on women’s time and labour without rewards, and do not provide them with the inputs (education, information, and land rights) they require’. In the affluent North, the gender assumptions are more subtle. Thus far there have not been any government programmes that overtly target women as they do in the South. Perhaps there is no need for this, since many western women have internalised the duty to ‘do their bit’ for the environment and voluntarily perform the tasks promoted by the ‘green agenda’. Some theorists, drawing on Foucault, have referred to this internalisation as a form of ‘environmentality’ (Luke 1995; Agrawal 2005) whereby people are made into good green subjects by adopting the values of environmentally inclined governments. Sandilands takes this approach when she argues that many women have become environmental subjects who wear their green duty with feminine pride. Describing what she calls

'motherhood environmentalism', she points out that North American women's concerns about nature tend to 'boil down to an obvious manifestation of natural protective instincts towards home and family . . . It is all about threats to children and self-sacrifice for the sake of future generations' (Sandilands 1999, p. xiii). Women's maternal role is often used as a justification for their involvement in environmentalism. I have called this 'ecomaternalism' (MacGregor 2006) in relation to western women's quality of life activism and now recognise its relevance to the politics of climate change.

Finally, women have long been presented as 'the problem' in environmental politics because of their role in population growth: in other words, because they are seen to have an unsustainable number of children. Climate politics has brought about a renaissance of the neo-Malthusian population discourse that has influenced environmentalism for decades. A growing number of environmentalists now lament the fact that population growth was allowed to 'fall off the agenda . . . because it is seen as too sensitive' (Nicholson-Lord 2006). They argue that the current climate change crisis demands that we cast aside our liberal sensibilities and make a renewed effort to tackle population growth because 'technology and lifestyle changes by themselves will simply be incapable of delivering' the necessary reductions cuts in CO₂ emissions (Nicholson-Lord 2006). The UK-based Optimum Population Trust (OPT), an organisation led by some of the most respected environmentalists in the country makes this very case. Among their policy recommendations is a voluntary 'Stop at 2' campaign (applicable globally 'except in EU states with very low fertility rates'), increased access to family planning, and the empowerment and education of women in developing countries to enable them to choose to have fewer children. They recently launched a 'population offsetting' scheme that asks people to donate to family planning campaigns as a way to atone for their carbon consumption sins (see <http://www.popoffsets.com/>). The OPT does not rule out coercive population policies, like China's one child rule, but recommend them as a last resort (see Guillebaud 2007). After all, climate change, it is acknowledged, is a global crisis that calls for drastic measures.

Feminists have always been harsh critics of population politics, even those that promote the 'voluntary and empowering' strategies mentioned above. One might find this confusing because feminists, by definition, want to improve women's quality of life and promote gender equality everywhere. And although few feminist environmental scholars would deny that steady growth in the numbers of over-consuming people on a finite planet is socially and ecologically unsustainable, they are deeply uncomfortable with the population question for a number of reasons. One is that for the majority of feminists (in the west if not the world), women's reproductive freedom is inalienable and non-negotiable. Rightly or wrongly, it is simply not acceptable to question whether there should be 'freedom to breed' because it opens the door to state control of women's bodies (Seager 2000). Moreover, feminists are suspicious of the tendency of population control advocates to see women – particularly women in the Global South – as 'the problem' and therefore the sole objects of population policies. They question why it is that it is always *women's* fertility that needs to be curbed (when it takes both men and women to produce a child), why it always poor, Southern women who need to be educated about their bodies (when women have been controlling their fertility for millennia), and why it is poor women who need access to reproductive technologies (invented, tested and sold by transnational

pharmaceutical companies based in affluent countries) in order to reduce the number of children they have. Feminists reject both the diagnosis of the problem and the typical cures that are proposed by population control advocates. Seager (1993, p. 216) sums it up nicely with the following criticism of the marriage of populationism and environmentalism: 'Women's fertility is implicitly (sometimes explicitly) blamed for the global environmental crisis. Population control is a euphemism for the control of women'.

The underlying assumptions that are made about human reproduction by (overwhelmingly male) neo-Malthusians are exposed by environmental justice and feminist scholars as products of patriarchal capitalism rather than 'objective science'. In spite of the lip service that is paid to empowering women and the poor, these critics have accused populationists of failing to take post-colonial and feminist analyses seriously. The perennial question 'are we too many?' simply does not leave space for their kind of analyses. Indeed, there is little recognition in population-climate change discourse of the complex reasons why women have more than the 'replacement number' of children (that is, two), reasons which include crippling poverty, the cultural preference for sons, male sexual violence, and the fact that the more women are devalued in a society, the more their only social capital is their ability to bear children. These are cultural and social problems that access to all the family planning education and reproductive technologies in the world will not address. Clearly, there is a need to move beyond 'impacts' and technical fixes to consider the values and ideological constructs that shape the material realities of gender inequality and ultimately contribute to our planetary crisis.

4. Conclusion

The predicted and observable impacts of climate change are undeniably frightening. The scientific consensus about these projections, expressed by the IPCC among others, has shifted the debate away from the question of whether anthropogenic climate change is really happening toward debates about what is to be done. And it seems that support for exceptional measures is growing: back on the environmental agenda are carbon rationing, nuclear power, GMOs and population control, ostensibly because there is insufficient time for more politically complicated alternatives. As in most crisis situations (such as in times of war), critical reflection on the unjust human relationships that may have led to the crisis is dismissed as a luxury we cannot afford. Understanding the gender politics of climate change is clearly not an urgent enough priority for it to be on the agenda.

Contrary to popular perception, climate change is not simply a gender neutral, scientific problem but one that is framed by deeply gendered discourses. I have attempted to show how the social constructions of masculinity and femininity emerge and are reproduced through these dominant discourses in different dimensions of the issue. From scientific and economic expertise to recommendations for greener lifestyle practices, the gendered discourses currently employed in the climate change debate gives voice to an entrenched gender ideology that rests on exaggerated differences between men and women. These discourses work to keep men and women in their ostensibly separate worlds of highly valued science, economics and defence, on the one hand, and devalued social reproduction and private domestic duty on the other. Masculinist discourses shape the issue in ways that effectively exclude women

from positions of leadership and citizenship and give them a choice of much less attractive discursive categories of victims, saviours or culprits. Moreover, the shift to a low carbon lifestyle is framed as an individualised and low status duty for women in the private sphere, while techno-fixes are viewed as brilliant innovations, earning elite men yet more power, wealth and prestige. As the old saying goes, the more things change the more they stay the same. Perhaps they are not staying the same but getting worse; perhaps we are witnessing an intensification of divisive sexist assumptions, justified by impending ecological doom.

Feminist environmental researchers, and all those concerned about climate justice, need to do much more work than they are currently doing to address this problem. The lack of attention by Western/Northern feminists to climate change politics, and the regressive solutions that it may be ushering in, is worrying. Feminists have been critical of environmental scholars for their blindness to gender. It is now time to be critical of feminist scholars who are blind to the environmental crisis. Although the work done by a small number of gender, environment and development scholars on the gender inequalities in the material impacts of climate change is important, particularly in alerting us to the hardships experienced by poor women in the developing world, I have argued that their analysis is too narrow. The analysis needs to move beyond seeing 'impacts' as only material and measurable effects (for example, increased poverty, intensified burden of domestic labour) experienced by 'empirical' and 'vulnerable' women in the Global South towards a feminist constructivist approach with the tools necessary for digging down and pulling up the deep roots of the discourses that frame gender and climate politics everywhere.

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