Introduction: Troubling gender expertise in environment and development

Voices from feminist political ecology

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1. Why this book, why now?

This book is about the daily struggles and achievements of ‘gender experts’ in the environment and development world. With a geographical focus on the Global South, we explore their work in environment and development organisations and interventions, where they are charged with advancing gender equality and social equity and aligning this with visions of sustainable development. Global climate change and disaster agreements and protocols contain clauses for the integration of gender equality in intervention programmes, building on multi-lateral conventions such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, and earlier platforms such as the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development Agenda 21, the Convention on Biological Diversity and Section K of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the post-2015 global development agenda, ‘gender’ has emerged as an important issue in global environmental governance and in the programming of environment and development organisations, driven by a requirement to address the ‘gender gap’ and its social and economic consequences (Arora-Jonsson & Sijapati Basnett, 2017). In this framing, addressing gender inequality is seen as necessary for managing environments and reducing poverty effectively and efficiently (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Prügl, 2015). Access to donor resources for environment and development work is often conditional on programmes explicitly demonstrating adherence to ‘gender mainstreaming’ or ‘gender-inclusivity’ principles and actions. The scope of this work is vast, ranging from gender analysis in the planning of technical projects on climate change, disaster risk reduction, energy transitions, pollution and food, crop production, land and water insecurity, to the integration of gender variables in geospatial technologies, modelling, scenario- and futures analyses and climate services.

The ‘doing’ of gender mainstreaming or gender-inclusive work has led to the emergence of the ‘gender expert’, a figure that is central to the professionalisation of ‘gender’ within the realm of environment and development organisations, programmes and interventions. We place the term ‘gender expert’ in parenthesis here as we deliberate on its emergence within the knowledge politics of environment and development work. Broadly, the job of the gender expert or gender advisor

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includes the review of policies and strategies, training, skills development and awareness-raising and implementing planning and monitoring systems to support gender equality (Eyben & Turquet, 2013; Davids et al., 2014; Bustelo et al., 2016; Caglar et al., 2013; Kunz & Prügl, 2019). The rapid rise of gender expertise in recent decades has come about in response to the wide adoption of gender mainstreaming in international organisations and governments. An international cadre of gender experts has emerged, comprising feminists, consultants and trainers who play a key role in translating feminist knowledge into development policy and practice (Prügl, 2013).

The rise of gender experts and gender expertise in development has prompted a vibrant critical discussion and raised some disquiet that feminism has lost its radical edge, as feminist agendas are co-opted for government purposes and even corporate agendas (de Jong & Kimm, 2017; Prügl, 2015; Cornwall, 2007a). A self-reflexive literature by gender experts themselves highlights the depoliticising effects of gender mainstreaming and failures to achieve its envisaged goals (Miller & Razavi, 1998; Baden & Goetz, 1997; Cornwall, 2007b; Eyben, 2010; Davids et al., 2014; Parpart, 2014; Milward et al., 2015). Contributors to this debate cite an overemphasis on technocratic approaches that rest on measurability, quotas and simplifications that are embedded in the development logic of international organisations, which means the transformative intent of gender mainstreaming is ‘streamed away’ (Mukhopadhyay, 2004: 95; Kothari, 2005). Similarly, its framing through a neoliberal discourse with a vocabulary of effectiveness, efficiency, impact assessment and ‘smart’ economics, diminishes any power to address feminist agendas (Cullen & Murphy, 2018; Ferguson, 2015; Nirmal, 2016). Instead, gender mainstreaming ‘adds value’ to ‘existing meta-narratives’ (Mama, 2004: 123), with a danger that underlying structural inequalities and wider well-being concerns are obscured (Fraser, 2009; Bradshaw, 2013; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Calkin, 2017; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; de Jong, 2016).

In this book, we explore the possible tensions and ruptures that are involved in bringing the feminist knowledges that underpin gender mainstreaming into the realm of technical and scientific knowledges that inform the work of environment and technical development organisations. Within the latter, technical, evidence-based and managerialist approaches dominate, based on the use of statistical indicators and impacts, hard evidence and rigorous data, weights in costs and benefits, imaging and remote sensing technologies, and risk assessments to render (unruly) nature more intelligible and eventually, more amenable to control and management (Taylor, 2014; Eyben, 2013; Valdivia, 2015). We join Arora-Jonsson and Sijapati Basnett (2017) in being struck by the enthusiasm with which ‘international environmental organizations appear to be increasingly adopting “gender mainstreaming” and employing “gender experts”’ (p. 309), despite the reverberations of the critiques outlined above. In part, this reinvigoration is being driven by the requirements of major multilateral donors with a mandate to address Sustainable Development Goal 5 (gender equality), and from the influence of bilateral donors such as Sweden that have been prominent in providing funds and technical assistance in environment and technical spheres.

We ask whether the epistemological interface between gender mainstreaming knowledges and environmental science raises particular questions around the subjectivity of the expert and the boundaries of expertise and the potential for meaningful (feminist) change. Critically, for the ‘gender expert’ positioned within environment and development organisations and programmes, the loss of a ‘transformative edge’ may be even more pronounced as gender work involves them operating in techno-scientific and managerialist fields with epistemologies and logics that amplify the instrumentalisation, simplification and depoliticisation highlighted in gender mainstreaming critiques. We debate this with an awareness that the entry of ‘gender experts’ into technical environmental fields has been hard-won. It represents the creation of a space in which at least there is dialogue for gender equality and scope for the making of a slow revolution to social justice in the realm of environmental work (Davids et al., 2014: 397; Arora-Jonsson & Sijapati Basnett, 2017).

Analyses of gender mainstreaming that unpick performative framings of power and subjectivity (e.g., Davids et al., 2014; see also Butler, 1990; Nightingale, 2011) and those that elicit personal and self-reflexive accounts of ‘doing’ gender in development contexts (e.g. Eyben & Turquet, 2013) have each challenged the supposed dichotomy between ‘good feminism’ (and ‘authentic feminists’ with transformatory intent) and ‘co-opted feminism’ (of ‘femocrats’ charged with gender mainstreaming). In different ways, these projects have punctured any sense of a simple binary by pointing to forms of ‘slow revolution’ that can ensue. Change comes through the ‘small, messy, fragmented and everyday kinds of subversions, conscious and unconscious’ (Davids et al., 2014: 404) where gender professionals are ‘subversively accommodating’ (Eyben, 2010), and the radicalness of change more deliberately relates to the depth of engagement (van Eerdewijk & Davids, 2013). Eyben and Turquet’s (2013) edited collection not only gives voice to these instances of ‘power in recoil’ (Nightingale, 2011; Butler, 1990) but its contributing authors provide reflexive accounts of their business as gender experts navigating the professional cultures within development organisations. What opportunities for power in recoil might there be in more technical settings?

Our interest lies in exploring the specific challenges that gender experts face in embarking on this slow revolution in contexts dominated by applied environmental science. Does this raise a particular set of questions and concerns that deserve scrutiny and self-reflection? Might we query the role of the gender expert in this context: transforming what, for whom and with what authority? Partly in response to critical academic debates around gender, environment and development theory and practice (Leach, 2015; Resurrección & Elmhirst, 2008), environment and development organisations of various kinds are undertaking efforts to stock-take and reflect on whether and how gender discourse and feminist theory have led to positive effects in areas within environment and natural resource management research and practice, and beyond that, in addressing sustainable development goals (Resurrección et al., 2019; Cochrane & Rao, 2019). Our aim is to extend and complement this work and to respond to the challenge that at this juncture we need ‘an inquiry into the internal dynamics of (environment and) development’s

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“regimes of truth” or of the production of professional identities’ (Mosse, 2011: 2; parenthesis ours); and ‘more research on knowledge producers, practitioners and policy makers – to understand how we work and our own preconceptions’ (Arora-Jonsson, 2014: 11). We do this by engaging the insights drawn from a rich literature on gender experts and other professionals in development contexts (Prügl & Lustgarten, 2006; Eyben & Turquet, 2013; Davids et al., 2014; Kunz et al., 2019) and bringing these into conversation with perspectives drawn from the conceptual terrain of feminist political ecology (hereafter FPE), with its emphasis on embodied power and the politics of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Rocheleau et al., 1996; Resurrección & Elmhirst, 2008; Sundberg, 2017; Ahlborg & Nightingale, 2017). FPE provides the framing tools for our focus on gender expertise and the tensions arising in the co-production of knowledge as gender experts operate in environmental organisations that are charting futures in food security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, sustainable energy, biodiversity, disaster management, water security, low-carbon transitions, environmental governance, and coastal management under neoliberal conditions.

As we ponder on gender expertise and mainstreaming and their interconnections with feminist political ecology in technical environment and development realms, we also engage with feminist science, technology and society perspectives (STS). Feminist STS studies have identified processes by which truth claims made by scientists enact an ‘objective’ perspective that is constructed as inherently valuable (Harding, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Bauchspies & Bellacasa, 2009). This raises some important questions. Is it possible to remain committed to a transformative agenda, whilst navigating environment and development bureaucracies *and working across* an epistemological interface with positivist science? Does an applied science professional context add an additional layer of complexity for gender experts whose ‘object’ of expertise (gendered power relations) is assumed to lie outside the purview of natural and technical science (Harding, 1986)? What kinds of conflicted subjectivities, positionalities and relationships are embodied by gender experts as they work through everyday dilemmas inherent in doing gender work in these technical contexts?

We thus explore the tensions that gender experts face as they seek transformative social change whilst working in technical-environmental contexts that demand simplifications and technical fixes (Li, 2007; Mosse, 2011). As recent global agreements attempt to accelerate action on climate change and bring renewed urgency to tackling environmental challenges, gender experts – advisors, researchers, organisational focal points – are called upon to navigate the complex epistemological ruptures and coalitions that emerge when gender analysis is brought into technical, environmental management settings fortified by positivist science. We are interested in understanding how people come to be ‘gender experts’ in such contexts, the authority and epistemic agency they are able to engage within environment and development work, and the extent to which they can carve out opportunities for ‘slow revolution’ towards social transformation, environmental justice and gender equality whilst working collaboratively with scientists to address profound and existential environmental threats. By reflecting

on and unpacking the experiences of gender experts and their everyday professional lives, our discussions also re-visit the suite of technical planning tools and other cultural artefacts of gender expertise (Liebrand, 2014) that have been developed within the ‘gender business’. This provides an opportunity to reflect on whether they have led to meaningful gender equality outcomes or have blunted the possibility of deeper transformation.

The book presents a collection of polyvocal essays written together with ‘gender experts’ working in technical and environmental science-led organisations, whose work is for the most part geographically located in the global South. We see this as an example of embodied theorising in feminist political ecology, reflexively examining our work in gender and environment ‘from who and where we are, rooted in place, networked across space and time, and connected to resources’ (Rocheleau, 2011; Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). Through our discussions and collaborative reflexivity, the chapters offer a series of reflections on our distinctive, situated and embodied experiences and shifting, troubled identities as ‘gender experts’ in the field of environment and development. As the chapters show, not all of us regard ourselves as ‘gender experts’ and some of us refuse this label entirely. What is shared is a willingness to deliberate on uneasy engagements with positivist epistemic communities and to begin to unpack the politics of accommodating gender in science and environmental discourse and institutional practices, and through this, touch on promising pathways towards a more politicised and emancipatory feminist praxis in environment and development. Below, we set out the approach taken in this book, beginning with a discussion of how we are engaging ideas associated with feminist political ecology and feminist STS studies. This provides the conceptual moorings that guide our reflections as well as a framework for our reflexive authorial approach.

2. Framing through feminist political ecology

Our discussions are anchored within feminist political ecology (FPE): an expansive and open-ended field rooted simultaneously in political economy, ecology and feminist activism (Sundberg, 2017; Elmhirst, 2015; Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). FPE research and practice broadly seeks to illuminate and act on social and gender relations of power associated with natures, cultures and economies, and in doing so, questions market-driven neoliberal forms of development. FPE challenges dominant practices of knowledge and authority that cast environmental change as a politically neutral process amenable to technical management (Rocheleau, 2015; Resurrección, 2017). Thus, FPE has emerged from earlier gender, environment and development studies (Elmhirst, 2015), and been enriched and given a more transformative flavour through strands that originate in environmental justice and feminist social movements (Di Chiro, 2016). Moreover, FPE is informed by feminist science, technology and society approaches that emphasise power and the situatedness of knowledge claims (Haraway, 1988; Rocheleau, 2011; Nightingale, 2011).

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Our reasons for engaging with FPE are many. First, FPE is an umbrella for the reflexive, conceptual and political tools that can push back against the charge that gender equality efforts are reduced to being a bureaucratic obligation. Feminist political ecologists are also among those who have been dismayed by the apparent professionalisation of the feminist movement and its apparent co-optation within both public and private sector development bureaucracies (Calkin, 2017; Lanz et al., 2019). Whilst one response is to distance FPE from mainstream development practice, with its link to neoliberal modes of governance and institutionalism (Mosse, 2011), another response is to ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016) in order to recognise and hold in productive tension the plurality of feminist knowledges and practice among activists, academics and development practitioners (Bustelo et al., 2016; Holvikivi, 2019). We follow others in troubling the boundaries between these different subject positions: we see gender experts as ‘activists’ in the organisations in which they work in large part because they broadly advance agendas of social inclusion. Furthermore, as Kunz et al. (2019) note, the situatedness of gender experts means some are deeply immersed at a personal level in work that challenges the colonality of universalised gender knowledge in development contexts (Kunz et al., 2019). Thus rather than characterise separate worlds of feminist activists on the one hand and gender experts and femocrats on the other, the aim must be to reflexively interrogate the silences between epistemologies and ontologies amidst this plurality (Nightingale et al., 2019).

Secondly, the transformative socio-ecological justice aspirations of FPE may be served by continuing to engage with mainstream environment and development practice, particularly as expressed through the business of international environmental organisations with their institutional capacity for making change happen. We join others in arguing that there is a real need for FPE to engage with powerful environmental institutions, particularly where the adoption of gender mainstreaming ‘is clearly having political effects beyond academic and feminist communities’ (Arora-Jonsson & Sijapati Basnett, 2017: 311). A number of those occupying the position of ‘gender expert’ in technical organisations regard themselves as feminist political ecologists, steeped in this subfield’s knowledge networks. This engagement is therefore already happening at an intimate and embodied scale, as some of our contributors demonstrate.

Thirdly, FPE offers critical tools that simultaneously serve the aims and objectives of the book, frame our discussions with our contributors, and inform our approach and process. We examine questions of subjectivity and power in the making of ‘gender experts’ (Butler, 2004; Sundberg, 2017), before drawing an analysis of the ways in which gender has been ‘rendered technical’ (Li, 2007) in environment and development contexts, setting the parameters for much of the ‘gender work’ of our contributors. Our concern is to explore the epistemological boundary between gender theories and the varied but largely positivist science frameworks guiding the work of technical and environmental organisations. This draws us to conceptualisations of scientific authority, located in FPE’s engagement with feminist science, technology and society debates (Haraway 1988; Harding, 1986; Nightingale, 2011).

Finally, the methodology and approach to authorship taken in this book is informed by feminist approaches to collaborative writing (Nagar, 2014; Harcourt, 2016), which has found resonance within FPE. This involves the co-production of often highly personal accounts, centred on the feminist practice of reflexivity, understood here as a form of disciplined self-reflection and awareness of the context in which knowledge is produced and situated (Haraway, 1988; Lumsden et al., 2019). This form of knowledge and writing is seen as lying outside mainstream science and political ecology (Armiero et al., 2019), even though it has been a longstanding mode of analysis and expression in academic feminism. We see reflexivity as important in highlighting key dimensions of gender expertise and the construction of knowledge across epistemological boundaries, and in recognising one's proximity to power (Bustelo et al., 2016; Ferguson, 2019). Further, we echo Bacchi (2009) in seeing reflexivity as a potential strategy to capitalise on small margins for change. Cognisant of the volume of criticism that has lodged the loss of feminism's political edge with gender mainstreaming and the professionalisation of gender knowledge, this approach recognises the value of the grounded practices of gender experts in environment and development settings (Cornwall et al., 2007; Verloo et al., 2009). Together, we explore the uneasy decisions and positionalities that each of our contributors has to create in order to engage in the various spheres of political influence required in order for gender equality agendas to gain serious traction (Ferguson, 2019).

3. Making the 'gender expert' and gender expertise

Our starting point has been to instigate conversations with people working in a professional capacity as 'gender experts' within technical environmental organisations that ranged from research institutes, advocacy-led non-governmental organisations, bilateral donors and policy think tanks. In identifying our contributors, we were effectively beginning with a two-tiered definition of the 'gender expert', as (i) a person with 'knowledge regarding the cause-and-effect relationship between policies, actions and/or activities and gender inequalities', who (ii) 'is formally requested to provide her (sic) knowledge and service' (Hoard, 2015: 12). However, as each of our contributors was, to varying degrees, uncomfortable with the label, we ask what and who is a 'gender expert'. In defining 'experts', sociological accounts of professions focus on the ways experts are defined by their acquisition and possession of specialist knowledge. They seek to secure their monopoly over knowledge and its use through credentialist ideologies, such as formal qualifications, and socialisation into the terminologies and social rules of the profession, and in doing so, distinguish 'expert' from 'everyday' gender knowledge (Saks, 2012).

However, Bustelo et al. (2016) state there is no agreed definition of the term 'gender expert', no common criteria of what their work entails, and no systematic mapping of the profession from which its boundaries might be defined, and from whence claims to authority may come. Instead, the lines defining what and who is a 'gender expert' are blurred and gender expertise is only weakly professionalised

(Prügl, 2013). Even as the institutional requirement to establish ‘gender mainstreaming’ is based on a set of practices that require specialist knowledge and training enshrined in specific claims for authority, there are no explicit standards, training or expectation of prior knowledge for gender experts, and only a minority has a degree in gender studies (Bustelo et al., 2016; Prügl, 2013; van Eerdewijk & Davids, 2013). Gender experts together may form what might be described as an epistemic community based on recognised expertise, competencies and authoritative claims (Hoard 2015) but their routes into this are varied, either via specific training on gender or via other kinds of social fields that led them to become gender advisors.

In line with a sociological emphasis on professionalisation, specialist knowledge and authority, a literature has emerged from discussions of gender mainstreaming that focuses on the everyday trials and tribulations of ‘gender experts’ in gaining authority within the organisations in which they work, and in working across epistemological boundaries, with the quantitative social sciences (i.e. economics) and the natural sciences (Eyben & Turquet, 2013; Ferguson, 2015). Feminist sociologies of the workplace have also anticipated the observation that knowledge hierarchies within organisations place a relatively low value on gender expertise – gender professionals may be early career employees with limited authority within organisational hierarchies, or women whose ‘main’ workload is topped up by gender mainstreaming responsibilities within their workplace. This, along with other factors, can mean gender experts may have limited authority within their organisations, whilst gender expertise itself is awarded low economic value (Ferguson, 2019). For example, in their discussion of gender mainstreaming in an international environmental organisation, Arora-Jonsson and Sijapati Basnett describe how despite the gender leader having a place on the organisation’s management board, the gender programme was ‘tested’ by outside consultants, unlike the other programmes (Arora-Jonsson & Sijapati Basnett, 2017).

Recent debate has focused on the *contested* positions of those whose work involves the translation of feminist and gender theories to practitioners (Bustelo et al., 2016; Davids et al., 2014). ‘Gender experts’ are positioned either as ‘trojan horses’ for feminism within development organisations or as ‘femocrats’, complicit in bureaucratising feminism and in the loss of its transformative edge (Cornwall et al., 2004). Others have troubled this apparent boundary, showing how people working as ‘gender experts’ in fact occupy multiple subject positions in and through their daily practice (Kunz & Prügl 2019; Ferguson, 2015; Eyben & Turquet 2013). In other words, complex subjectivities are materialised in the context of gender mainstreaming work.

Theorisations of subjectivity and power that figure in Feminist Political Ecology (Butler, 1990; Nightingale, 2011; Bee, 2019) direct us towards examining how expert subjectivities and expert knowledges (of gender) are performative and co-produced. In this view, subjectivities (such as the ‘gender expert’) are not stable but come into view and are reproduced relationally, through power-laden webs of political and social relationships that define and create expertise in gendered, racialised and colonialist ways. The embodied subjectivity of the gender

expert is thus lived and enacted through these webs of relationships in material and institutional spaces (environmental organisations, workshops, laboratories, networks, in fieldwork contexts) and through everyday practices (conversations, training, advice and advocacy) materialised in the tools and artefacts of gender mainstreaming.

A useful framework to consider the performativity of expert subjectivities and expertise is developed by Kunz et al. (2019), who focus on the boundaries that gender experts must navigate, draw and erase as they seek to get heard and establish their authority. Kunz et al. (2019) identify three ‘fronts of struggle’ that play a role in forming the subjectivity of gender experts and in the forging of gender expertise in development settings: first, the boundary between gender expertise and feminist (social movement) politics; secondly, the relationship between gender expertise and postcolonial (and decolonial) politics; and thirdly, struggles around the authority of gender expertise in the context of scientific epistemologies.

Taking the first of these, the relationship between gender expertise and feminist politics is multi-stranded and multi-directional, and this complexity underpins the conflicted subjectivity of gender experts. In interviews undertaken for their study of gender professionals, Kunz et al. (2019) find an ambivalence towards political or social movement feminism, as people either did not self-identify as feminist or drew a distinction between their personal feminist politics and professional gender expertise. This kind of boundary making is understood as a way of keeping their gender work safe from feminism (Kunz et al. 2019), seeing politics as antithetical or unhelpful towards the ‘do-ability’ of their professional responsibilities. The ambiguity lies in the acknowledgement that the knowledge on which gender expertise rests is derived from political feminism. Earlier debates have noted the ways in which stereotypical understandings of feminism in many institutional contexts make this a pragmatic decision (Cornwall et al., 2007) but it is one that reinforces a distinction between feminist social movements and the figure of the ‘femocrat’ or bureaucratic ‘mandarin’ that have been subject to much critique (Miller & Razavi, 1998; Cornwall et al., 2007).

Boundary work is embodied in specific ways, which challenges a clear-cut dualism between bureaucracy ‘insiders’ and feminist movement ‘outsiders’ (Rao, 2006). Discursive power within development organisations and in feminist social movement politics work together to produce gender expert subjectivities that are placed as ‘outsiders’ within their own organisations because their expertise is at odds with dominant expert paradigms, whilst feminist politics places them as bureaucracy ‘insiders’ or femocrats (Eyben & Turquet, 2013). Eyben and Turquet adopt the phrase ‘tempered radicals’ to describe bureaucratic subjectivities that draw on support from friends and colleagues in the feminist movement. Thus, boundaries not only bound difference (Nightingale, 2011) but include relations of proximity, positional slippages and political solidarities of various kinds (Holkiviki, 2019; Harcourt, 2016). A performative approach to expert subjectivities gives space for showing the instability of boundaries and embodied subjectivities (Butler, 2004; Nightingale, 2011). Temporal and spatial dimensions of power mean bodies can potentially move between feminist and bureaucratic subject

positions over time (over the life course) and across spaces (working in university, development organisation, or advocacy body), thus troubling the boundaries of ‘gender expertise’ and its separation from feminist knowledge.

The second area of boundary work relates to understanding how the subjectivity of gender experts and the authority of gender expertise is shaped through the embeddedness of gender and development expertise in the politics of coloniality, defined as longstanding patterns of power which redefine knowledge production ‘in ways that accredit the superiority of the coloniser’ (Mendoza, 2015: 114; Mohanty, 1988). Such patterns of power are related to the establishment of the universal authority and hegemony of Western knowledge and discourses (Sanna & Varikas, 2011: 7, cited in Verschuur & Destremau, 2012). The figure of the gender expert is implicated in the politics of coloniality as the professionalisation of gender expertise in international development institutions has been built on a universalised gender knowledge, assumed to be transferable and applicable in any given context (Kunz et al., 2019). As Kunz et al. (2019: 34) note, ‘a geographical hierarchisation of gender knowledge privileges supposedly universal insights and problem-solving skills over socioculturally specific gender knowledge and solutions emerging from a particular context’, whilst the authority to ‘identify relevant and complex gender issues in the hands of gender experts is located in big international institutions’. Yet the ways in which this plays out in and through expert subjectivities is complex. By embodying intersectional articulations of racialised, classed and gendered power, gender experts are variously positioned in relation to the logics of coloniality in gender and development within their personal and professional biographies, complicating their authority as ‘experts’ in their everyday practice. The logics of coloniality draw a distinction between ‘international’ and ‘local’ staff, and the everyday relational dynamics between these two positions defines the ‘gender expert’ and their field of expertise in different institutional contexts.

Thirdly, practices that mark and attempt to dissolve the boundary between gender expertise and scientific knowledge are part of the processes implicated in both establishing expert subjectivities and the field of gender expertise itself. Kunz et al. (2019) suggest that a key strategy for gender experts seeking to gain authority within development organisations has been to erase the boundary between epistemologies of gender and of science, the latter characterised by quantitative knowledge and the employment of positivist methodologies. This has not only meant utilising statistical indicators and quantitative impact data, but also subscribing to the logics of practicality rather than critical thinking. ‘Practicality is knowledge that is able to provide clear-cut solutions amenable to technical manipulation and intervention’ (Kunz & Prügl, 2019: 31). A dominant development vocabulary of effectiveness, efficiency, impact assessment and ‘smart’ economics is put into play (Davids et al., 2014: 401), as gender experts translate their work into language that can gain traction and hold weight in the contexts in which they work (Dersnah, 2019). For example, Kunz et al. note that gender experts in the World Bank need to know economics and thus to use particular kinds of data (Kunz et al., 2019).

In organisations whose operations are underpinned by environmental sciences, gender experts seek to establish their authority by translating their work through governing technologies such as log frames, surveys and gender audits, which ‘reflect the episteme of the biophysical and natural sciences’ (Mukhopadhyay & Prügl, 2019: 10). Complex subjectivities emerge as gender experts who are tasked to ‘integrate’ gender with natural science research and knowledge production attempt to challenge epistemic hierarchies that position their expertise as an appendage to the positivist sciences. Rather than reject the cognitive authority of science, gender experts (like social scientists working in multi-disciplinary environments) gain authority and credibility by developing a working fluency in the language and practices of dominant networks and disciplinary specialisms within their organisations (Forsyth, 2003; 2011). Thus gender work is made ‘do-able’ within an overarching Cartesian logic of making (unruly) nature intelligible and manageable through technical means (Taylor, 2014), in pursuit of a productivist market logic.

Processes of boundary making and undoing are inscribed and embodied within gender expert subjectivities in other ways also. Hiring practices for gender experts within environment and development organisations favour those candidates with an academic background or a working knowledge of a relevant academic discipline (e.g. marine biology, conservation science, forestry or engineering, depending on the context). Those with a background in social science or gender studies achieve something similar by undertaking technical training, familiarising themselves with the technical requirements or the field, positioning themselves as knowledge translators that are adept at working across hierarchical epistemological boundaries and tuning in to specific socio-environmental contexts. In so doing, their subjectivities blur epistemic distinctions and the universalising logic of gender mainstreaming.

4. Gender experts engage with ‘science’

In exploring the uneasy engagements of gender experts with scientific authority in technical environmental settings, we draw on insights that emerge in the interface between FPE and feminist STS. We now see a growing number of gender experts in technical environmental organisations as current global environmental agreements are opening up to norms upholding gender and social equity as mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction. We note that the technocratic aspects of gender mainstreaming – that have been subject to so much feminist scrutiny – are coalescing with positivist frameworks that guide applied science, technology and environmental research and policy. We now bear witness to an emerging coalition of knowledges, reintroducing gender through the neoliberal economic discourse that colours the gender mainstreaming project with a dominant development vocabulary of effectiveness, efficiency, impact assessment and ‘smart’ economics’ (Davids et al., 2014: 401) that sidesteps analysis of structural inequalities (Desai, 2007). This transformation has enabled technical organisations to welcome gender expertise – and its managerialist and economistic turn – into their

assemblages of modelling, GIS, and other types of quantitative indices to track, measure, evaluate and predict environmental outcomes and trends (Cornwall, et al., 2007).

The ascendancy of science in shaping environmental agendas comes with the aim to curb the increasingly catastrophic consequences of environmental and climate change largely through technical fixes (Nightingale et al., 2019). This is reflected in the growing number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)-oriented experts in key advisory roles for governments and multi-lateral agencies committed to figure ways out of the environmental and climate crises. This is especially felt in the governance of science and technology for sustainable development at different scales. For instance, at the UN Environment Program (UNEP) alone there exist 17 international global environmental regimes with each of their global and regional secretariats that have established their respective scientific committees and partner think tank organisations. This has driven renewed attention to examining the efficacy of the science–policy interface (Gluckman, 2016). Despite its uneven and unpredictable receptivity and even denials from some in the policy world and other quarters of conservative scepticism, science has nevertheless been vested a distinguished place in large part ‘by its relative objectivity obtained through formal processes designed to limit bias in data collection and analysis’ (Gluckman, 2016: 969).

In response, STS and political ecology scholars have thus been motivated to unpack the social making of science in a number of ways beginning by questioning the almost universal adherence to scientifically authenticated truths (Fairhead & Leach, 2003) and investigating the authoritative representations of ‘evidence-based knowledge’ in planning for policy (Juntti et al., 2009; Eyben, 2013; Saltelli & Giampietro, 2017). Others have probed the ways that science makes nature understandable and amenable to control and management (Castree & Braun, 2001; Loftus, 2009; Taylor, 2014); exposing the links between science, states and markets with emphasis on the growing neo-liberalisation of these institutions (Goldman et al., 2011). Appreciating the wider implications of scientific authority means recognising the epistemological foundations of the technical and engineering sciences with their exclusions of power and interpretive dimensions of the use of resources and its place in social life (Zwarteveen, 2017). Critical perspectives on the dominant reliance upon technical fixes that address specific maladies (e.g. climate change) are mismatched with grounded experiences and needs, which themselves are shaped in large part by other political economic changes affecting communities, yet which lie outside the purview of socio-technical approaches (Nightingale et al., 2019). Such debates overall highlight that environmental science and policies are never free from their political contexts (Robbins, 2012). Feminist STS, for its part, fundamentally asserts that science is far from being impartial, highlighting its ‘situatedness’ (Haraway, 1988), and exploring ways to make this transparent: for what purposes, for whose interests, and how (gendered) knowers are themselves situated in contested spaces of power and resources?

Feminist epistemologies politicise knowledge production, but also necessarily focus on the structural and embodied forms of power that shape socio-environments,

and that necessitate analysis and critique (Nightingale et al., 2019). This may be at odds with the requirements of environment and development, where the emphasis is on techno-fixes and managerialist approaches. Here, the critical political edge of feminist knowledge becomes a liability, sometimes labelled as ‘too complex or academic’ (Ferguson, 2015). The kind of knowledge required from gender experts in technical settings includes compelling evidence to show that women’s inclusion in environmental programmes will lead to favourable outcomes, among them, *better* climate adaptation and mitigation, water and sanitation management, disaster recovery and reconstruction and to some extent, better ‘green’ investments (Pearl-Martinez, 2014; Coleman & Mwangi, 2013; Harper et al., 2013; Harris & Abbott, 2018). This knowledge can leverage authority especially when it marshals evidence through the clinical objectivity of quantitative data. Technical organisations have their own inertia of doing things as defined by their knowledge practices and preferences: institutional rules, structures, practices, and the identities of the agents which animate them may continue to be primarily iterated to the political and social interests which institutions are designed to promote in the first place (Goetz, 1995: 2). This is also reflected in the revival and growing popularity of the use of economic cost–benefit analyses to justify the necessity for gender programmes in environmental organisations and in finance ministries. However, whether these organisations indeed accommodate gender programmes on these terms remains an under-researched area.

A popular example of this analysis is from a FAO publication circulating the notion that if women were more productive, the world would be less hungry: ‘if women’s access to productive resources were the same as men’s, this would increase farm production yields by 20–30%’ (FAO, 2011: 5). If left on its own, this analysis may inadvertently perpetuate gender stereotypes and the unequal reproductive food provision roles assigned to women, mobilise women as a reserve army of often undervalued labour without addressing their well-being interests and rights, and pass on to women the tasks of mitigating food insecurity that deflect from addressing its wider political economic causes and origins. As we write, climate change programmes and organisations are also trying to calculate the benefits of women’s involvement in adaptation and mitigation measures. They highlight the severity of gender-specific impacts of climate change, anchored in the idea of climate change as an external, natural threat or hazard, sidelining its political economic nature that builds on the persistent economic dependence on fossil fuels. Accounting for gender impacts makes for a compelling case to include gender in climate change agendas, thus inviting planned interventions that seek to technically cushion and ameliorate these impacts without sufficiently addressing their fundamental causes (MacGregor, 2010; Tschakert, 2012).

Gender-informed evidence in the form of stylised facts, or short punchy messages with seductive statistics, is mobilised in strategic ways using the necessary vocabularies for crossing technical and social science divides (Cornwall et al., 2007). While these actions and strategies may indeed help form coalitions and play to a mixed audience of technical and business specialists making the gender agenda more palatable, recent work in FPE, feminist STS and decolonial thinking

directs us to greater reflexivity and accountability with respect to the ontologies that are mobilised in environment and development work (Lamb, 2018; Clement et al., 2019). Specialists working on natural resource management historically align their work with the Enlightenment goal of intervening in the affairs of nature so that it is made useful and productive for human populations through science and technology. While almost indomitable, this ontology of productivism can be altered to more centrally position a socio-ecological justice framing for the well-being of human and non-human species. As calls for placing equity and a more politicised vision of sustainability at the analytical and policy center stage grow louder (e.g. Leach et al., 2018), specific types of knowledge need to be deconstructed by asking: knowledge for whom, knowledge for what? For example, Tuana (2013) examined an Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) model of climate change risks and raised questions about the criteria being used to designate risk, which seemed to favour potential risks only for industrialised countries. Ultimately, by utilising such criteria, she asks whose interests are being favoured by the model and its data, and whether the well-being of those least responsible for but most affected by climate change is excluded from consideration.

Technical specialists are not required to see or understand the social realities within which their solutions and interventions are embedded (Zwarteveen, 2017). This reflects how the academic sciences have historically evolved in fragmented ways, obscuring the fact that knowledge is plural; however some knowledges are vested more authority than others. Researchers using multiple (e.g., positivist and non-positivist) epistemologies as a way to bridge knowledges are able to interrogate the silences between them and arrive at more amplified and less bounded understandings of socio-technical, environmental and gendered realities (Nightingale, 2003; Nightingale, 2016; Nightingale et al., 2019). From another vantage point, Harris (2015: 158), in her study of the multiple uses of water, acknowledges the importance of recognising ‘everyday, embodied and emotional relations of people (and women) to resources and “natures”’. This is respect and recognition for ‘local, historically-embedded and culturally-grounded forms of knowledge’ (Leach et al., 2018: 8). By taking a step back and reflecting on their work, the contributors in this book are able to situate their mandate for transformative change within the landscape of authoritative knowledge in their own organisational context. Some of the contributors describe how, in navigating these different coalitions of knowledge, they are able to lever small openings for change. These brief excursions into the politics of knowledge can also lead to new ways of conducting gender analyses while realising epistemic justice (Aragon, 2019) and working with plural forms of knowledge beyond positivist science.

5. Collaborative reflexivity: our process and contributors

Our process for this book is built around generating knowledge collaboratively and relationally through reflexive conversation and embodied theorising. We invoke what Icaza and Vázquez (2016) describe as thinking from embodied

experience and from the body. This involves us talking, thinking and writing through reflection on the experiences of our contributors. These are all people working in organisations that are variously positioned as sites of interaction for the central task of producing environmental knowledge and shaping policy norms. Reflexivity – conscious self-reflection on the implications of one’s situatedness within different axes of power, privilege and affective relations – is an important element of feminist research and practice. A reflexive process underpins many of the contributions to ongoing debates around gender mainstreaming and gender expertise more broadly (Eyben, 2010). We have sought to work from a dialogic approach to reflexivity: using conversations to begin a process of reflexive analysis (Nagar, 2014), and from this we seek to capture ideas as they emerge from our co-learning encounters (Icaza, 2015; Browne et al., 2017). From these reflexive discussions, our writing strategy is to build engagements with wider theoretical and contextual debates. As Browne, et al. (2017) describe in their collaborative work, we have not always reached agreement on our interpretations, analyses and arguments: rather than smooth these over, we leave them in the text. In our choices around wider theoretical and contextual engagements, we are unable to decentre our editorial authority from the text entirely. Instead, we aim to be transparent about where authorial centering has taken place.

Our starting point was to develop our collaboration out of our professional ‘rooted networks’ (Rocheleau, 2015; Cantor et al., 2018), acknowledging that ‘networks’ necessarily involve exclusions and partial perspectives (Haraway, 1988). Each chapter is based on a series of conversations with contributors – writing and thinking as co-authors – who have a level of professional engagement with gender work and gender mainstreaming within technical environmental contexts. Each of us (editors and co-authors) is variously situated and privileged in terms of gender, race, career stage, coloniality and proximity to power within and outside our respective organisations. We have sought to avoid foreclosing around simple positional binaries in our editorial decisions, and instead our process (and the reflections of our contributors) is informed by ‘intersectionality’ where gender, race and other axes of power operate in dynamic interplay (Lykke, 2010; Cho et al., 2013). We share the view that gender and other aspects of domination are mobilised and hold specific meanings in specific contexts (Baines, 2010; Vita et al., 2016; Cho et al., 2013). In development work, questions around the implications of global north–south relationships and racialised privilege and authority may be accentuated (and perhaps simplified) more than is the case in other fields of work (Mollett & Faria, 2013). Intersectionality informs our process but also the reflections of our contributors. We add to this through a reflexive emphasis on how our positionalities intersect with the epistemic hierarchies around science and other ways of knowing within our respective work contexts that shape the tensions of being change agents (on the one hand) and also status quo bureaucrats or professionals, on the other (Eyben & Turquet, 2013).

We developed this as a form of collaborative autoethnography (Chang et al., 2016), which began with us inviting each of our contributors to write some brief thoughts on their positionality and role as a ‘gender expert’ within their specific

institutional context. From this, we developed some questions to guide our initial conversations, which we both participated in. A follow-up conversation then took place to explore specific themes in more depth. The conversations were then converted into polyvocal essays, considered through relevant literature where this provides emphasis or enables deeper reflection and analysis. This ‘embodied theorising’ elicited deliberations on a range of experiences around issues of power, knowledge, positionality and identity, and the forces and factors that invest individuals and institutions with epistemic authority or deprive them of it (Aragon, 2019). For the most part we followed Browne et al. (2017) in maintaining the voices within each chapter in order not to flatten out our differences. In the spirit of mentoring from the page, we asked our contributors to share encounters that brought small ‘wins’ or learning points from within their practice. As each chapter shows, the conversation zoomed in and out between the everyday politics of bringing gender analysis into science and environmental discourse and institutional practices, and wider deliberations on epistemologies and power. What emerges on the page in large part reflects the subjectivities of our authors (as scholar-activists, as development practitioners) and ourselves in our editorial capacity.

The book divides into three interrelated themes where co-authors and editors engage in conversations about different but sometimes overlapping dimensions of each theme, grounded primarily on experience and self-reflexive thoughts on feminist practice. Under the first theme, *the politics of identity and boundary marking*, Maeve Nightingale of the International Union of the Nature Conservancy (IUCN) and Joy Clancy of ENERGIA and the University of Twente narrate their own boundary crossings from marine biology and mechanical engineering to gender research and policy development. In separate chapters, they narrate episodes where they engage respectively with homogeneous audiences of fellow engineers and gender specialists, reflecting on the strategies and actions that blur disciplinary boundaries, as well as those that constantly create them. Joy and Maeve tell us that outcomes from these episodes vary from more openness towards gender issues to creating unhelpful divides between gender experts and non-experts that can also occur in feminist circles. Gordon Prain reflects on a long career as a senior social scientist at the CGIAR International Potato Center (CIP). Through it, he highlights his changing, multiple yet interlocking identities where epistemic hierarchies at work kept him vacillating between positions of privilege and disadvantage. Andreea R. Torre disusses gender expertise with researchers at the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), Ha Nguyen, Lisa Segnestam, Emily Ghosh, Laura Forni, Natalia Biskupska and Marisa Escobar, citing immediate differences and deeper commonalities between gender experts, aspiring gender experts, and female technical scientists within a multi-disciplinary organisation, showing how the ‘gender expert’ is a contested claim and a complicated construct. Clara Mi Young Park of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) unpacks the situated character of gender mainstreaming in politically difficult contexts thus deconstructing imagined divides between activists and femocrats in mainstream multilateral organisations like the UN. Kate Lappin of Public Services International (PSI) and former director of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women,

Law and Development (APWLD), on the other hand, remarks that gender work nowadays is being done in a safe way through its career-orientated trajectories of professionalisation, whereas she thinks that gender inequality transformation instead rests on building a new feminist fossil fuel-free future by strong social movements.

In the book's second theme, *the politics of knowledge in environmental and development realms*, contributors like Nicoline de Haan of the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) engage with livestock breeders, puncturing small openings for dialogue and collaboration along the practical lines of livestock health by setting up multi-disciplinary teams with complementary roles to play. Carol Colfer, formerly of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) discusses the importance of contextual learning to challenge universalisations of gender in forest contexts and the transferability of ethnographic methods in developing knowledge for forest governance. Marlène Elias of Bioversity International engages with technical scientists by navigating technical knowledges and using moments in the field to open spaces for dialogue around gender. Annette Wallgren and Victor Tsang of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) pull the UN's mandated levers for gender and social equity integration with UNEP's internal programmes and optimise them as spaces for engagement, which they anchor firmly in the inter-linkages between people, society and environment. Margreet Zwarteveen of IHE Delft Institute for Water Education and Seema Kulkarni of the Society for Promoting Participative Ecosystem Management (SOPPECOM) tell of their engagements with water engineers in imagining water happiness maps instead of water productivity maps and enabling spaces for more deliberative democratic action among Indian civil society groups in tense water negotiations at subnational scales. Hilde Jakobsen, Napapan der Kinderen and Maria Holtsberg who work for disaster risk reduction (DRR) organisations describe entrenched hegemonic masculinities and the inertia of 'command and control' in the continuum between emergency management, humanitarian aid, and DRR.

The final theme is on the *power of gender champions* that brings donor reflections to the book. They discuss and showcase the positioning of gender agendas in their relations with partners and internally within their organisations. Maria van Berlokom, Eva Johanssen, Orawan Raweekoon and AnnaKarin Norling of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) share their observations about how their partners respond to gender mainstreaming, highlighting the politics of knowledge within their partner organisations but also reflecting on their proximities to the spaces they as donors wish to transform. Senior gender advisors Kai Spratt and Charles 'Will' Lewis II openly tell of the thinning resources and commitment to gender equality within USAID and point to how this may be embedded in the wider politics and changing narratives around development aid more broadly.

As editors, we situate ourselves thus: Bernadette (Babette) as a woman-of-colour academic originally from the global South; and Rebecca (Becky) as a white woman from the United Kingdom, writing from her position as an academic in a teaching-led university. We have different professional biographies: whereas

Rebecca is a university teacher in Brighton focusing on thinking through feminist political ecology largely in a classroom context, Bernadette's work as a gender specialist with the think-tank Stockholm Environment Institute in Bangkok brings her more directly into development practice and policy research. Our journeys to these respective positions include women's movement activism (in the Philippines and in the UK), practising gender expertise directly in development projects (largely in Southeast Asia), and assuming the role of educator (in a university context and in practitioner workshops). The contributors, and indeed each of us as editors, are also variously situated in relation to the category 'gender expert', with some resisting the category entirely. Indeed, this professional categorisation was one of the points from which we launched our discussions.

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