Seeing the Quiet Politics in Unquiet Woods: A Different Vantage Point for a Future Forest Agenda

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Abstract

We address two aspects of forest lives—violence and care—that are central to forest outcomes but often invisible in mainstream discussions on forests. We argue that questions of violence and care work in forests open up debates about what forests are, who defines them, and how. We draw primarily on feminist work on forestry, violence, and care to examine the gendered nature of forest conflicts and the 'quiet politics' of resistance to violence grounded in the everyday work of care that are crucial to understanding forests and their governance. We show how varied practices of resistance to violence and injustice are grounded in cooperative action of care and are an intrinsic part of shaping and regenerating forests. We highlight the importance of close attention to seemingly mundane actions rooted in people's daily lives and experiences that shape forests.

Keywords Forestry · Gender · Care · Violence · Everyday politics · Forest communities

Introduction

Violence is a tangible presence in forest contexts. Between 2002 and 2017, 1558 people in 50 countries were killed for defending their environments (Global Witness in Butt *et al.* 2019). Indigenous groups are overrepresented in these numbers (Middeldorp and Billon 2019). Conflicts often arise around the extraction of resources, illegal logging in community forests, and when state agencies grant user rights to commercial interests for resources used by local communities (Gerber 2011; Knox 2017; Butt *et al.* 2019). A great deal of violence is contingent and transitory, but an increasing amount is institutional and structural: initiated, advocated, and enforced systematically by laws and institutions of the state, corporate organizations, and community or family and can be psychological, sexual, and cultural (Jackson 2002; Pain and Staeheli 2014). Violence is rooted in changing relations between political economy and mechanisms of access, control, and struggle over environmental resources

(Peluso and Watts 2001) and has lasting ecological dimensions (Guha 1989).

While there has been attention to conflictual relations in forests, especially since Guha's (1989) pathbreaking work in 'unquiet woods,' less has been given to its gendered nature and to the 'quiet politics' (Askins 2014) of resistance, belonging, and everyday work of care in understanding the social life of forests and its contribution to forest futures. Feminists have brought attention to how violence cuts across places and scales and how the violence in intimate spaces is associated with regional, national, and global processes, just as larger geopolitical processes are created by and consist of relations and practices of intimacy (Jacobson *et al.* 2000; Pain and Staeheli 2014). There is growing awareness within the social sciences of the dissolution of customary boundaries between global/local, familial/state, and personal/political as objects of study (Pain and Staeheli 2014). We argue that accounting for the simultaneous workings of violence at different scales and sites such as forests and households is essential to understanding forest contexts. While violence in forests by illegal contractors or state agencies encroaches on the intimate, intimate violence such as within the household persists precisely because it is rooted in other sites and structural relations. One form of violence compounds the other (cf. Pain 2014).

At the same time, we show how varied practices of resistance to violence and injustice are tied to cooperative action

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of care in the everyday and are an intrinsic part of shaping and regenerating forests (Arora-Jonsson 2013). Such resistance and everyday work are rarely concerned with large-scale projects but depend on daily resistance and seemingly mundane actions rooted in women's daily lives and experiences (Jenkins 2017). Care work, including women's work in the forests, is subsumed in conventional forestry definitions that associate forests only with timber, woody biomass, or biodiversity conservation and is ignored in discussions concerned only with public acts. At the heart of this inattention lie the different meanings given to what is considered 'work' in the forest and definitions of what makes a forest (Arora-Jonsson 2013:18–19).

A masculinization of forests accompanied the advent of scientific and commercial forestry, especially in the global North, which has had significant implications for both forests and the people living in them (ibid:46–59). The notion of neutrality in mainstream forestry conducted by forest departments, forest companies, and international organizations disregards the ubiquitous assumption of forests as mainly a male domain and the violence that that engenders. At the same time, questions of gender and power in what is considered the private sphere are assumed to be separate from the management of forests. Such approaches disregard women's and men's ties to forests outside of the purely economic, e.g., spiritual, emotional, affective and personal, which are central to the work of care but also at the heart of violent acts.

Our aim is to highlight these absences and relations crucial to forests and forestry, in many cases from the vantage point of women in the forests, a social group very present in forests but simultaneously absent in official thinking both in the global South and North, except as a group that needs to be engaged in conservation (Leach 2007) or in markets for forest products (Westholm and Arora-Jonsson 2015). At the heart of unequal and overlooked forestry relations are inequalities in tenure and decision-making that more often put women at a disadvantage compared to men (e.g., Fortmann 1995; Agarwal 2001; Ramdas 2009). Considerable research on gender and forestry (see review in Arora-Jonsson *et al.* 2019) shows overwhelmingly that forestry cannot be considered separately from its social lives. The embeddedness of forestry in other parts of people's lives needs to be understood. Here, we focus on relations of violence and care that shape forests but remain invisible to mainstream forestry. By mainstream forestry, we refer to the selective understanding of forests as tree cover, primarily by official agencies, but also studies and analyses that while addressing the social dimensions fail to take account of everyday gender and power relations that form the invisible infrastructure of forestry in different contexts and that are integral to forest outcomes.

We begin by discussing literature on forest and environmental violence and relate it to literature on violence against women for a better understanding of increasing violence in the forests and its links across scale and sites. We then turn to the literature on resistance to violence and on care work that is crucial to counteracting the systemic oppressions that can lead to violence. Next, we analyze some of the gaps in making these connections and argue that a disregard for conflicting definitions of forests, values, and what is considered work in forests lie at the heart of these omissions. We end with a discussion of a different vantage point needed for a future forest agenda that is just and sustainable.

Unquiet Woods

Forests are seeing increased violence in on-going conflicts over territory and resources, violence that is sometimes perpetrated by government authorities in their zeal for conservation (Rights and Resources Initiative 2018). According to human rights advocates, the sheer scale of the problem, which includes the killing of environmental rights defenders, demands notice. Violence is even more pronounced for groups such as women who may also face other forms of discrimination such as gender-based violence and exclusion from male-dominated decision-making processes. Because the rights they seek to protect are less well understood in international and domestic law, their defense of those rights may sometimes seem to fall between categories (Knox 2017). It can be warfare, conflicts over land and forests, conflicts within communities for swidden fields or regrown secondary forest. It can be gender-based violence prompted by 'speaking out of turn,' expressing contrary opinions or for no apparent reason at all. But it can also be violence of co-optation, psychological and cultural. The simultaneous workings of violence at these different scales and sites are essential to understanding forest contexts and for analysis of its systemic implications for men and women in forest contexts.

The literature on violence and environmental change rejects simple causal relationships between environmental change and violence although they are certainly related (Peluso and Watts 2001). At the same time, it is evident that violence plays a significant role in determining identity-based claims and establishing control of new actors over trees and land and their claims to legitimate access or 'rightfulness' as well as establishing dominance and identity (Richards 1996, 2006). Changing production practices and reconfigurations of territories and identity-based property rights are implicated in hiding the violence (Peluso 2009). Guha's (1989) early work on protests against commercial forestry provoked thinking on production or conservation forestry

by focussing attention on the lives of people living in these 'unquiet woods.' While thinking on the social relations of forests has changed forest research and policy considerably, their gendered aspects and especially the question of violence has received far less attention.

Violence is highly gendered and cuts across class, caste, and other dimensions of power. As Falb *et al.* (2015: 302 citing WHO reports) note: "A recently released UN analysis shows that violence against women persists at 'alarmingly high levels.' Worldwide, one in three women reports sexual or physical violence from a male partner at some point during their lifetime, and such experiences have been linked with harmful effects on health, including maternal morbidity, poor mental health, and vulnerability to HIV/AIDS." In many forest areas, employment opportunities for men have decreased as women's have grown. This has on occasion resulted in increased domestic violence against women (e.g., Silberschmidt 2001). As feminist research has made so evident, sexuality and sexual acts, including violent ones are not just individual occurrences but are bound up with power structures in society (Jacobson *et al.* 2000).

Women have spoken to researchers of their fear of violence at the hands of both contractors engaged in forest investments and in the home (Arora-Jonsson 2013). As cases from Latin America show, violence is often associated with outsiders such as big multinational companies, among others (Zamora and Monterroso 2017 cited in Arora-Jonsson *et al.* 2019). In East Kalimantan, Indonesia, the arrival of forest outsiders has made Kenyah women, who previously felt safe spending the night alone in their fieldhuts, fearful of now doing so (Colfer *et al.* 2021). The case of Macarena Valdés, a young Indigenous Mapuche woman suspected to have been killed because of her struggle against forestry and hydroelectric expansion, is one in a long list of violent stories around forestry expansion in Chile.[1] In Honduras the assassination of Berta Caceres, an Indigenous Lenca woman and a Goldman Environmental Prize recipient in 2015 for her opposition to a hydroelectric dam is another such emblematic case (see Middeldorp and Billon 2019).

Researchers show how even intimate violence against women is enmeshed in state politics. The state has been shown to play a vital role in supporting victims of violence as well as curtailing the spread of violence once it takes place. It is in fact the weakness of the state (Schroeder 1999; Dolan 2002) and, as in India, its inability to address caste and class violence (Kumari 2017) that can create the context for continued or heightened violence. This can also be seen in the austerity measures undertaken in the West that led

to cuts in domestic violence services and the provision of justice, resulting in a huge displacement of people from their homes. For example, although the U.K has had no recent war on its territory and thus has no official Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), in England alone in 2009–10 18,812 women accompanied by as many children left their homes and previous lives behind, relocating to other parts of the country to escape domestic violence (Bowstead 2015).

Governments and States are far from innocent in violence. Violence in forests is usually presaged by incentives to companies to log forests or to facilitate infrastructure creation, such as sawmills and cellulose plants or tree plantations (see Bull *et al.* 2006). In several countries, the greatest expansion of the timber industry occurred under repressive regimes, for example, violent military dictatorships in Chile, Brazil, and Indonesia, or South Africa under apartheid (Gerber 2011). State-led special security forces are often used to protect corporate forests (or tree plantations), which in many cases has encouraged militarisation of forestry conflicts, as for example in Chile where several Indigenous people have been jailed and tried under anti-terrorism laws for resisting the occupation of their ancestral lands, now planted with pine and eucalyptus forests (ACNUDH 2014).

In his treatise on violence, Fanon (1963) draws attention to violence as the fundamental element of colonization and colonial oppression. Both across the global North (Lantto 2014) and South (Peluso 2009), scholars have shown how authorities have induced communities to change production practices, often through violence, allowing the erasure of prior identity-based claims and establishing control of new actors over trees and land in reconfigurations of racialized territories and identity-based property rights. Such internal colonization has left deep scars that continue to fuel land disputes over forested areas with significant gendered implications and resistance (e.g., Veuthey and Gerber 2010). In Sweden, for instance, where commercial forestry expansion began in the 1800s and continued as part of the welfare state, the Indigenous Sami lost much of their reindeer grazing land (Lundmark 2006). As the state appropriated forest land, the transition from customary ownership eroded women's authority over land and male ownership became cemented in law for both the indigenous and wider communities (Beach 1982; Arora-Jonsson 2013). This has had important repercussions for Sami women as membership in decision-making as well as Sami villages is often contingent on ownership (Arora-Jonsson 2017: 66) and their dispossession can be seen as form of 'structural' violence.

While little attention has been paid to the relationship between gendered violence and implications for the landscape, there is considerable scholarship on how state violence as well as insurgency and counterinsurgency result in changing the forested landscape (Peluso and Vandergeest 2011). This is evident in the forced establishment of planta-

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[1] See https://hrdmemorial.org/hrdrecord/macarena-valdes/. The police claim that it was suicide and an investigation is ongoing. Last Accessed 26 Feb 2019.

tions, mining, military installations, or conservation areas. Conservation, often linked to geopolitical interests such as in current climate programs, can exert structural violence on women as they lose customary access to forests and/or are expected to compensate for the loss of men's income from the forests with more pressure on their agricultural work (Arora-Jonsson *et al.* 2016). Such processes not only change the forest landscape but also bring changes to social relations in the villages around them. Further, care of forests is contingent on what happens within households, while forest relations make direct inroads into household relations.

Where forests in their successional variety disappear, so can the handicrafts, arts, and nutritional variety that contribute to local livelihoods. In Chile, an Indigenous Mapuche described forest expansion by the state and private companies: ''… our parents and grandparents have been tortured and humiliated, we live and have lived in such precarious conditions...it's not easy to forget that" (Gonzalez-Hidalgo and Zografos 2017:70). In the global North, Indigenous communities experience such expansion as a 'colonization of the attachment' they have to their ancestral lands (Groves 2015), changing the landscape as forests are taken over for extraction and protection and affecting the identity and capacity of communities to shape their futures as well as a sustainable future for their environments (Arora-Jonsson 2019).

Territorial control necessary for forest extraction is enabled by the concentration of land, public–private investments, or direct use of violence, but also by more subtle strategies, practices, and technologies of governance (Peluso and Lund 2011). Informality and co-optation can also be used to impose certain (forestry) values over others. For example, in pulp and timber plantations in Chile, violence and control were exercised by forest companies through "good neighbour" and "environmental education" programs that sought to foster good relationships between private and public forestry institutions and local communities by offering services such as medical care, hairdressing, and football tournaments. We argue that this was a subtle form of violence as propaganda and financial inducements to leaders of communities (usually men) to encourage sale of their (and local women's) community's lands led to internal conflicts that reduced communities' ability and commitment to work together to protect their resources. As one settler in Southern Chile remarked, "Paving our roads, building football pitches… the forestry enterprises are giving us painkillers" (Gonzalez-Hidalgo and Zografos 2017:70).

Similarly, in south-eastern Cameroon, loggers began offering remuneration for cutting down moabi trees that led to conflicts within households with some individuals, primarily men, wanting to sell the lineage moabi and others, often women, actively opposing such sales because of the food, income, and medicines they got from the for-

ests and because they derived no benefits from the sales (Veuthey and Gerber 2010). Colfer *et al.* (2021) reported a case in East Kalimantan where the plantation company brought back individuals (men) who had left their original communities to lead new communities, ostensibly to help them reclaim the lands they had abandoned in anticipation that they would work to ensure more company access to community lands. Land was assumed to belong to men, not women, and compensation is given to men. This strategy, too, built on and exacerbated internal community tensions creating new conflicts among men and between men and women.

Parashar and Shah's (2016) account of the Maoist insurgency in the forests of India shows how the continuum of sexual violence extends from state authorities to Maoist ranks, despite the latter's discourse on gender-equality, which was subsumed by the idea of class struggle. They argue that the violence of states when responded to by violence only perpetuates a patriarchal logic of violent masculinity. This, we argue, is reaffirmed by a masculinization of the forests that enables the idea of forests as a male domain.

The creation of such conflicts has been aptly dubbed by Butt *et al.* (2019) as the 'supply chain of violence' as external investments or outside interventions such as capitalize forest conservation schemes lead to increased violence – also in the home. It is increasingly recognized by humanitarian agencies that in many such cases, "the burden placed on women to provide for the basic needs of their families increases exponentially…consequently girls are moved further away from the realization of their socio-political rights". There is a need to dismantle the distinctions between so-called private/domestic violence and the public world and the continuities of war and 'non-war' (World Vision 1996 cited in Jacobson *et al.* 2000: 5).

Research in Indonesian (Elmhirst 2011) and Malaysian (Lin 2008) forests has shown how outside interventions are part of redefining local ideas of sex roles, making access contingent on more differentiated ideas of men's and women's natures and roles than may have existed traditionally. Similarly, outside intervention in a forestry context in Sweden reproduced and established the authority of certain men over decision-making on the forests but by extension, also over other village matters (Arora-Jonsson 2013). As this research indicates, economic, social, emotional, and psychological aspects of domestic partnerships, household-level power dynamics, bodily integrity, and violence are deeply intertwined with what takes place in the public spheres of management, conservation, and business.

All violent oppression works through intimate emotional and psychological registers as a means of exerting control, whether in warfare or the domestic arena, the global North or South. In work in Scotland with women who experienced domestic violence, for instance, Pain (2015) draws

connections and parallels to warfare as she traces the tactics deployed by the perpetrators such as 'shock and awe' to instil fear, or 'hearts and minds' using emotions as a weapon, going from aggression to appeasement in order to manipulate their victims and to maintain control.

According to Pain and Staeheli (2014: 345), the separation of violence either as local/every day or political has all sorts of undesirable effects. Many analyses of state violence do not acknowledge that the same types of violence are often found in the domestic/intimate realm. It is essential to analyse how this influences the diffusion of violence in the public sphere and how 'intimate' acts violence persist precisely because they are rooted in other sites (for example, the organization of power relations that keeps women from decision-making on forestry and other such discriminations). All forms of gendered violence are part of the same complex of harm and control (Pain 2014).

Women and transgender forest workers and activists are often more subject to violence and sexual assaults, sometimes by fellow activists, due to the remoteness of forests (Mallory 2006). Violence reaches not only environmental defenders, but also communities, nature, and the sustainability of their relations. As many of the forest studies cited above show, in forest livelihoods as elsewhere, "the personal is political" and as research on violence indicates, the political makes deep inroads into the personal.

Resistance and a Quiet Politics of the Possible

There is always resistance to violence and to interventions that bring oppression. Considerable research has highlighted women's roles in grassroots movements to protect forests (Shiva 1989; Guha 2002; Veuthey and Gerber 2010) and, although less researched, women's protests and support for continued commercial logging in order to safeguard their family livelihoods (Reed 2000). Women have been at the forefront of grassroots environmental movements to secure livelihoods (see Rocheleau *et al.* 1996) and against businesses that threaten them, such as the widespread movement in India against making of local liquor, arrack, that had important implications for community livelihoods (Tharu and Niranjana 2001).

Jenkins (2017) contends that women's anti-mining resistance in Peru and Ecuador was rarely concerned with large-scale protests, transnational activism, and attracting widespread attention; rather it depended on daily resistance and was rooted in women's daily lives and experiences. Overt and organized instances of resistance, such as campaigning against the mines, were a part of prosaic daily practice, often forged through everyday low-level confrontations within their communities. Their activism also implied hav-

ing to integrate very unusual circumstances in their everyday realities, including death threats, kidnapping, torture, and imprisonment.

In an analysis of collective action in the forests, Agarwal (2003) distinguishes women's involvement as tending towards agitational actions, in contrast to the instances of long-term organizations often dominated by the men. However, troubling the 'preoccupation with public acts' (Reed 2000:366), based on long term work with women's groups that organized themselves outside of mainstream forest organizations in villages in India and Sweden, Arora-Jonsson (2013:23–24) argues that the work that women do in the environment, in public and private spaces tends to remain invisible until the women choose to act as a collective, overtly contradicting conventional organizing principles in public spaces. These included hunger strikes, occupying public spaces, hugging trees to ward off loggers, or hiding the tools of men quarrying for stone in the forests. In relation to co-operative action, women's networks and actions related to their villages tend to focus on multiple issues, and often do not resemble more permanent forms regarded as viable cooperative organizations associated with forest work.

The women's groups in India and Sweden straddled the public and the private as they took action in the spaces between the public (forests) and the private (households) to activate community spirit by organizing village festivals and other activities, planting trees, fixing water tanks, protesting contractors in the forests, striking for the village road, taking up anti-dowry campaigns, or protesting domestic violence. The women made clear that the public sphere is in practice indivisible from the private 'ethic of care'. As a Swedish village woman critical of the separation of decision-making and discussions on the forests from those on village issues remarked: "we need to think about the forests as part of the big thought—the future of our countryside." Local development and forest governance could not be separated from the care work of women and men in the community. Their work was integral to making local village and forest governance work. Such work however does not have the recognized legitimacy accorded to the visible, male dominated organizations and tends to remain outside the view of forest researchers and forest/development actors.

Feminist economists (e.g., Folbre 1994; Elson 2017) trace the neglect of informal work to orthodox thinking on economic development that privileges wage work and the market at the expense of non-commodity labor performed largely by women, and simultaneously obscures the complex variations in women's experiences. By neglecting how management and maintenance of forests are simultaneously contingent on processes of social reproduction and exclusion of the creation of non-market value, the constitutive role of crucial elements of everyday life in the making of the forests is hidden. Quantitative time-use studies across forest communities have consistently shown that women do more care-

work than men (see Colfer 1999). As Federici (2012:2) points out: "The reproduction of human beings… and the immense amount of paid and unpaid domestic work done by women in the home is what keeps the world moving." The distancing of production from reproduction and consumption leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat, wear, or work with have been produced, their social and environmental cost (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen 1999: 141).

Federici (ibid.) argues that violence against women was a necessary precondition for capitalism. She describes the witch trials of the early modern age as a tool for early capitalism to alienate women from the means of (re)production: "The body has been for women in capitalist society what the factory has been for male waged workers, the primary ground of their exploitation and resistance." Although ostensibly the purpose of women's un-waged work is to reproduce their own families, it ultimately serves to provide the capitalist class with the labor power the economy requires and with a new generation of workers. And yet, as we know from our studies above, such care work that provides the infrastructure for mainstream forestry can also provide alternative value to many women and is instrumental in resisting dominant paradigms.

Women's resistance and collective action can also provoke political repercussions. As a FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front) woman soldier in Mozambique noted: "The choice to become a guerrilla is not one that a woman can take lightly. She has so much more to lose than a man" (Arthur 1998 cited in White 2007). Women stand up to domestic violence and to violence that might take place in the home but that is linked to economic violence across scale (as local economies are integrated into the global) in a system that assigns social reproduction to women in the home (Federici 2004).

Incongruously, the language of war can permeate peacetime activities of care and regeneration of the forests. Women's groups in India adopted the language of battle by calling themselves the 'Paribesia Suraksha Vahinis'—Environmental Protection Brigades. However, when the leader of one such group demanded that questions of dowry and violence against women and women's work of care be part of the formal discussion on the forests, she was subjected to violence at home for 'shaming her husband.' Accusations of disavowing 'tradition' and of immorality due to modern influence – such as going out and speaking up – were used to subdue the women's groups challenging mainstream forest committees (Arora-Jonsson 2013:189–207). Jenkins (2017:1451) shows how women's activism in Peru and Ecuador made experiences of actual or threatened violence commonplace, taking a toll

on their mental health. Such violence also has debilitating physical implications.[2]

Nevertheless, the groups that the women created in villages in India were built on existing networks of caste, age, or ethnicity. Organizing collectively in women's groups was a political act, not spontaneous, although their focus was often on livelihood issues for the whole village. It was a 'quiet politics' of belonging and caring about local community connected to other scales (Askins 2014), but also a 'politics of the possible' (Arora-Jonsson 2013:107–150) as they navigated systems that constrained them to bring about change.

Such relationships and actions are grounded in the ways that various actors relate to the forests, the work they do in them and the values they assign them. We argue that some of the challenges for a forest research agenda lie in understanding how definitions of forests and what is considered work and value in the forests are at the root of these omissions.

Addressing Blind Spots in Mainstream Conceptions: Conflicts over Definitions of Forests, Work and Value

The literature confirms that defining forests is far from conflict free (e.g., Chazdon *et al.* 2016). In recent decades, the forest sector has undergone policy shifts as people's participation and attention to gender relations in forest issues began to be recognized as important in bringing about sustainable forest governance. Nevertheless, definitions of forests adopted by major international environmental and forestry organizations centre on trees. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), responsible for world-wide surveys of 'forests,' definition is:

> Forests include natural forests and forest plantations. It is used to refer to land with a tree canopy cover of more than 10 percent and area of more than 0.5 ha. Forests are determined both by the presence of trees and the absence of other predominant land uses….
>
> The trees should be able to reach a minimum height of 5 m at maturity *in situ*. Young natural stands and all plantations established for forestry purposes which have yet to reach a crown density of 10 percent or tree height of 5 m are included under forest, as are areas normally forming part of the forest area which are temporarily unstocked as a result of human intervention

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[2] See https://thewire.in/health/kashmirs-hopeful-mothers-have-a-silent-enemy-in-the-states-violence

or natural causes, but which are expected to revert to forest".[3]

This definition ignores the social relations that make forests what they are. In the past in some countries such as Sweden, official definitions were even more restrictive and based only on available timber. This was in stark contrast to how forests have been thought of in popular imagination, as "the shirt of the poor, their protection from the cold and their home. The forests follow a person from birth to death" (Arora-Jonsson 2005:107–111).

Official definitions seek to lock meanings by mapping and categorizing forests. Forestry agencies have sought to categorize forests, such as degraded, secondary forests, plantations, primary forests, allocating particular characteristics to differing disciplines and constituencies, thereby establishing authority over land (cf. Scott 1998). In a study in Burkina Faso, a World Bank official (cited in Arora-Jonsson *et al.* 2016) discussing the mapping of forests for the REDD+ climate program epitomizes this ambition:

> "With mapping … the objective of this piece of land is changed, it becomes specialized. People know that this place is set up for conservation and this place is set up for production … a way to enforce land use. It won't be like, five years later we say, 'oh, this was supposed to be conservation but now I don't care, I'm just using it in production.' No. You need something to avoid changing the objective of land use."

This approach is far from people's experience of forest relations on the ground. Ecologists too have called for a broader and richer concept of forests that blurs the boundaries of definitions applied by existing forestry, agriculture, and conservation institutions (Chazdon *et al.* 2016: 542) and that pays attention to the many different facets in which humans interact with forests including different types of management such as tree plantations, restoration, and afforestation (see other papers in this issue). Others have considered forests as landscape mosaics, composed of areas, for example, of dense tree cover, secondary forests, agricultural fields, housing and cities (Mertz *et al.* 2012). Nevertheless, the paramount importance of tree cover (Chazdon *et al.* 2016) and an assumption of the separation of the public space of the forests from what are regarded as the private spaces of the household or the in-between space of the community has continued to characterize mainstream research on forests and steer forest definitions.

Conventional forest policies have prioritised certain values (timber, biodiversity) over others (non-timber forest products (NTFP), or swidden agriculture) and in doing so they also define what forest 'work' is or should be (see

Holmgren and Arora-Jonsson 2015). For example, studies of forest communities in Scandinavia have shown how both men and women tend to view men's activities in the forests as 'work' while women's activities in the forests are not regarded as work by either men or women (Kaldal 2000). Early feminist research on forestry showed how different values are ascribed to forest areas in relation to the work done by men and women (Fortmann and Bruce 1988; Leach 1994; Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997). Women tended to work in the in-between spaces not seen as forest work – for example in the land in-between men's trees, in the understories of plantations, on degraded land on steep hillsides. These researchers argued for understanding multidimensional niches in the rural landscape defined by space, time, specific plants, products, and uses, arguing that gendered domains in forests may be both complementary and negotiable. A lack of understanding how labour in villages and the home enable forest relations restricts the understanding of what forests entail.

Official forest definitions also disregard values beyond the economic that motivate people's actions. A recent study by the *Centre of Science and Environment* on the implications of the new *Forest Rights Act* (FRA) in India (Agarwal and Saxena 2018) found that when a private trader offered a better rate for *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) leaves than the forest department, tribal women from six Odisha villages contracted to supply him. The forest department strongly opposed the deal and insisted that the leaves could only be sold to the department. *Tendu* leaves are a significant source of revenue for the state government (estimated at more than USD 70 million p.a.). The choice available to the women was to sell the leaves to the forest department for whatever it offered or not to sell their leaves at all. Time was a crucial factor in the women's decision, as *tendu* leaf quality deteriorates quickly without proper storage, which was unavailable to the villages. The women agreed unanimously to trade on their own terms and forego the potential revenue if the forest department did not change its position and respect their rights under the FRA. In a major victory for the women, the forest department acknowledged – albeit after six months of sustained protests – that communities have the right to engage in private trade of nationalized Minor Forest Products (MFPs). While it was clear that the women would prefer higher prices, they were willing to sacrifice immediate rewards for a longer-term goal of both higher prices and greater freedom and recognition of their rights.

In recent years, bottom-up initiatives have emerged showing conflicting values in relation to forests and the key issue of defining forests. In one initiative, social movements from the Global South compiled testimonies, images, and

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[3] www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4171e/y4171e10.htm

evidence to show how tree plantations represented "desertification, exploitation, colonisation, and starvation" while forests represented "regeneration, preservation, self-determination, nutrition."[4] The campaign, 'Plantations are not Forests!' supported by international environmental non-governmental organisations such as Friends of the Earth and the World Rainforest Movement, seeks to show the value of forests beyond the economic. In collaboration with several local grassroots movements, mainly in the Global South, the campaign seeks to raise attention and critique definitions of forests based on productivity and extraction with no mention of forest-dependent communities and the diversity of human-environmental relationships that take place in and near forests.

Although research since the 1970s has highlighted gendered differences, gender-neutral approaches have colored environmental policies and programs, both in the Global North and South (Arora-Jonsson 2014). Researchers in a large study on 23 REDD + climate programs over several years found that women were not involved as stakeholders by the authorities and that being in a REDD + site was significantly associated with a drop in women's well-being when compared to a control group over the same period (Larson *et al.* 2018). Discrimination against women often results from the institutional structure of official bureaucracies, other outsiders, and discriminatory legislation as much as it derives from customs within communities.

In the community forestry program undertaken by the FAO in the 1990s, the officers realized that the programs in the villages were most effective and involved a larger number of people especially women, when the local forest officers (such as the DFOs) took up a range of issues related to the forests that were not technically encompassed by the definition of forests – including issues within the household (*pers. comm.* Marlyn Hoskins, FAO, Uppsala, 2002). Similarly, in their research on violence prevention, Kusuma and Babu (2017) argue for the need to coordinate efforts among a range of relevant areas and groups: health, education, police, the judiciary, and community groups for effective programs.

Such approaches recognize that while for some actors, forests are mainly a source of timber, biomass, or energy, for local communities they also provide medicine and a well-balanced nutritional diet (Howard 2003; Cunningham *et al.* 2008; Nascimento *et al.* 2012). For some, forests are important for tourist activities or recreation, others as a source of livelihood, and yet others as a site of production or of biodiversity that needs to be conserved. Forests are also an intrinsic part of people's identity, a symbol of masculinities or femininities (Johansson 1994; Arora-Jonsson 2004; Colfer

et al. 2021), and in the North, a reason for choosing to live in rural areas (Bergelin *et al.* 2008). Ignoring this diversity of what forests are and the work done in them is a serious gap in an understanding of forestry contexts.

The power of individual preferences in landscape appearance is greater than suggested by most academic literature (Colfer 2003). González-Hidalgo and Zografos (2017) show how indigenous and peasant communities in southern Chile, surrounded by pine and eucalyptus monocultures, experience anger and sorrow in their daily encounters with the monotonous, dry, and fruitless plantations when recalling memories of dispossession associated with the expansion of tree plantations and their past use of forests for fruits and medicinal plants. Forest engineers on the other hand feel pride and happiness associated with what they consider a good and productive management of the same forest.

Where previously landscapes such as in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, were a complex mosaic of rice-fields and stages of forest regrowth, each providing a different repertoire of foods, fibres, medicines, and timber, a plantation provides neither the variety of products nor the visual, cultural, and emotional links that the original forest-field complex had. This was beyond the fact that the produce from the plantation no longer belonged to the local people who had previously managed and considered that they owned the forest (Colfer 2009).

Another example is the Javanese in Sumatra and their penchant for very evenly planted crops, in contrast to the chaotic home gardens and re-growing rice fields of the Kenyah (Dayak). Such differences about ideal landscapes usually pass unrecognized, and can, at their most superficial, result in misunderstandings and inaccurate expectations. Similarly, not accounting for conflicting views on the impacts and nature of disasters in forests such as storms and forest fires, even among different forest organizations has been shown to be detrimental for post-disaster planning (González-Hidalgo *et al.* 2014; Lidskog and Sjödin 2016).

Local communities see not only their cultural systems under threat by commercial forestry, but also their spirituality that in many cases they have tried to recapture after years of commercial forestry plantations. In Southern Chile, Indigenous Mapuche communities associate the reduction of native forests and availability of water due to the expansion of tree plantations with the disappearance of the spirits (*ngen-ko*) in their territory. It is usually female *Machi* (shamans) who first notice this loss. If the *ngen-ko* are not there, *Machi* knowledge and existence also disappear. This has impacts not only for indigenous livelihoods, but also for the survival of their knowledge and worldview that connect native forest biodiversity, water, medicine, and spirituality (González-Hidalgo and Zografos 2017).

In the Swedish study, the women's groups also often invoked the spiritual in relation to the forests. While they were seen as being caught up in the New Age wave, their

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[4] See https://plantationdefinitiondiscussion.wordpress.com/2016/12/21/whats-in-a-word/

spiritualism although taboo in a hyper secularized society, talking about their relation to the spiritual felt important for the women perhaps because subjectivities created within modern rationalism do not—or cannot— contain the generation of hope for a new ethical social order (Arora-Jonsson 2013: 119–120). Women's discussions of how the forests were 'a salve for their souls' (Bergelin *et al.* 2008) provided transgressive spaces in an otherwise rationalized discussion of employment opportunities or the environmental benefits of standing forests and of the close links of scientific forestry to male foresters.

Controversies about "what forests are" and who defines *what and who* forests are for are key in local and global forestry agendas. The shifting nature of forests in relation to changing vegetations but also importantly different understandings of what constitute forests continues to be disregarded in official discourses and routines. Acknowledging and making visible such conflicts, especially in relation to how violence and care-work 'make the forests' would help confront everyday inequalities and injustices and make for more robust understanding of forestry and peoples.

Conclusion: A Different Vantage Point for a Future Forest Agenda

One of the aims of this article has been to open up blind spots in conventional thinking on what forests are about in order to engage with and foster a future forest agenda that is both sustainable and just—taking into account the challenges that forestry implies for the everyday life of local communities. Engaging with questions of violence and gendered care work in forests opens up debates about what forests are, who defines them and how**.**

In this we follow previous feminist work that proposes a 'different vantage point' (Arora-Jonsson 2008) for studying forests. Rather than beginning with conventional understandings of forest issues, we draw on scholarship on everyday experiences of people and especially women, living and working in forest contexts, although these are typically assumed not to be related to forestry as it is usually defined. In studies on violence, Pain (2015) argues for an inversion of the usual orientation in order to articulate the relation between the intimate and wider political structures. She advocates taking the intimate as the starting point or building block from which the analysis moves out, both methodologically and conceptually. Such approaches imply examining the intimate dynamics of forestry and violence—the ways in which military tactics, or state or company interventions and domestic relations and violence operate through emotional and psychological registers that are as central to their effectiveness as incidents of direct physical harm. In

other words, linking the household, the village, the community, the national, and international spheres in order to understand the complexity of forestry contexts.

As we have shown, rather than being 'domestic,' violence in the home has significant institutional and structural implications, not only for the men and women directly concerned but across scale in the routines of forestry and in defining what forests are and to whom they belong. Women's unpaid labor and their absence in official thinking is grounded in the assumption that men are the norm, a reason that violence against women is possible and rampant. Since they are not assumed to be in the forests, authorities and others then disregard this violence as having nothing to do with forestry. As Pain and Staeheli (2014:345) note: "The idea that violence is purely or even primarily a matter of interpersonal relations in itself helps to sustain oppression."

Feminist research indicates the need for a systemic and contextual understanding, including addressing paid and unpaid forest-related labour in one frame. A future for sustainable forests would address this seemingly invisible infrastructure that supports work in and with forests. Extensive research on forestry across the global North and South has shown that women's work in forests is often ignored in mainstream forestry, which values forest activities that are often related to the commodification of forest products whose trade is often male dominated. Most of women's forest-based labour is unpaid, and forest products that women are responsible for are often less economically valuable. Women also perform most of the care work that underpins the recognized and overtly valued commercial work widely considered 'men's work.' This entails acknowledging care work in the home but also the subsistence work that men or women carry out in the forest. The role of authorities and other official actors is vital in these efforts and requires recognition that women's care work often invisibly underpins the recognized and overtly valued commercial work widely considered 'men's work.'

In both the global North and South, women especially have often chosen to forego economic benefits in favour of other forest outcomes they see as benefiting their communities, families, and themselves (Bergelin *et al.* 2008; Agarwal and Saxena 2018). Yet these elements central to forest-dependent peoples' lives are often disregarded in academic and political discourses that prioritize the economic value of forests. Considerable research has shown that relations of care and affect as well as the spiritual are central to the building up and sustaining of community forestry networks (see Arora-Jonsson *et al.* 2019). These relations have significant material and conservation outcomes that cannot legitimately be overlooked in thinking about forestry. Especially in countries in the global North, the focus on either conservation or production agendas has ignored the question of livelihoods as well as diversity.

We need to confront the gendered nature of institutions, particularly in local areas but also across the national and international levels, responsible for policy making and projects that help to shape conditions on the ground. As examples from recent climate programs suggest, policymaking of all sorts needs to be sensitive to these nuances when promulgating reforms intended to be inclusive.

Resistance to violence, cooperative action, and care work take place in the minutiae of daily life. Our research indicates that these need to be an intrinsic part of the thinking on forest futures. Or as a woman in Odisha's (India) forests, speaking in relation to demands that violence against women be included in the discussions of forest committees set up to govern forests, said: "What is the point of protecting the forests when we cannot protect ourselves?".

Declarations

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