



Messing with gender in feminist political ecology

Sharlene Mollett^{a,*}, Caroline Faria^b

^a *Geography Department, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, United States*

^b *Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies, Florida International University, Miami, FL, United States*

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ABSTRACT

Feminist political ecology (fpe) is at a crossroads. Over the last 2 years, feminist political ecologists have begun to reflect on and debate the strengths of this subfield. In this article, we contribute by pointing to the limited theorization of race in this body of work. We argue that fpe must theorize a more complex and messier, notion of 'gender', one that accounts for race, racialization and racism more explicitly. Building on the work of feminist geography and critical race scholarship, we argue for a *postcolonial intersectional analysis* in fpe – putting this theory to work in an analysis of race, gender and whiteness in Honduras. With this intervention we demonstrate how theorizing race and gender as mutually constituted richly complicates our understanding of the politics of natural resource access and control in the Global South.

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1. Introduction

Feminist political ecology (fpe) is at a crossroads. Over the last 2 years, feminist political ecologists have begun to reflect on, and debate the strengths of this subfield (Hawkins and Ojeda, 2011; Elmhirst, 2011b). Fpe scholarship has re-emerged with a new energy, inspired in part by engagements with post-structural theory and the acknowledgement of the role of spatial and embodied practices in constituting gendered subjectivity (Elmhirst, 2011a,b; Hawkins and Ojeda, 2011; Rocheleau, 2008). This has enabled a more explicit acknowledgment of various forms of difference. Upon closer reflection however we caution that the decentering of gender remains unfulfilled in fpe. Almost 15 years after Rocheleau et al. (1996) launched the landmark book, *Feminist Political Ecology: Global Issues and Local Experiences*, we attended a session titled "Gender and the Environment: critical traditions and new challenges" at the 2010 Association of American Geographers meetings. The session panelists presented case studies that emphasized gender and environment scholarship and fpe in particular, disclosing the multiple and contemporary ways access to and control of natural resources are gendered. In this session, panelists often presented gender as a code for other forms of difference, with some brief mention to race, class, sexuality, nation "and so on" (see Hawkins and Ojeda, 2011). However with few exceptions these differences, as axes of power, were rarely addressed and racism

was never mentioned.¹ As postcolonial subjects and women of color, we responded by asking the panel if they might somehow explain this elision: why since its emergence in 1996 have we seen such a paucity of a sustained engagement with race in fpe?

During the Q and A most of the panelists nodded in acknowledgement of the relative silence around race in fpe, yet it was suggested that this absence "has to do with context". We find this response curious. This is not the first time we have heard justifications for why race remains understudied in political ecology. In fact, much of the subfield either avoids addressing race explicitly or elides an explicit engagement with race by subsuming it into the more palatable language of "difference" and "ethnicity" (Mollett, in preparation). As critical scholars, feminist political ecologists must of course pay attention to "context" or, said differently, the politics of place. Yet in the arena of international development, and with the geographic trend for fpe to focus on the Global South: South Asia, Latin America, East Asia, Africa and Oceania, an analysis of context in fact demands more critical attention to race. In particular, such work must pay attention to caste, ethnicity and regional ethnic nationalism – markers that are all intricately bound to race, racism and racialization and that in turn shape the relationship between gender and the environment. Race is also relevant to our understanding of international development and narratives of modernization and progress (Bhabha, 1994; Escobar, 1995; Fanon, 1967; Spurr, 1993). Devel-

¹ This we would add is the same observation we make for a recent Geoforum special issue titled, "Introducing new feminist political ecologies" (Elmhirst, 2011a). In the combined sessions not a single paper or presentation was explicit about race, racialization and/or whiteness. Only one paper, while implicit (Nightingale, 2011), analyzes aspects of racialization in a discussion of caste.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: Sharlene.l.mollett@dartmouth.edu (S. Mollett), Fariacv@gmail.com (C. Faria).

opment narratives have colonial origins where racial naming and their concomitant racial labels: “European”, “Asian”, “Amerindian” and “African” and the thousands of varieties of these categorizations, were disseminated, and where binaries of all kinds (savage/civilized; tradition/modern; customary/formal; collective/individual) were and remain part of colonial and post-colonial racial orderings (Escobar, 1995; Fanon, 1967; Doty, 1996; McClintock, 1995). After Power, we agree that “specific ideological formations and persistent normative assumptions and expectations have flowed from colonialism into development” (2003, pp. 136–137; see also Escobar, 1995) where “non-western economies are presumably lacking in their development and where their economic and cultural practices and institutions are rendered inadequate” (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 32). Development discourses discursively produce the global south as “different” and “inferior” (Escobar, 1995; Chakrabarty, 2000; Power, 2003; Ferguson, 2006; Radcliffe, 2005). Given, then, that development thought and practice (including various projects i.e. agrarian reform, biodiversity conservation, land titling programs, water and sanitation) are deeply racialized, why do we continue to see a paucity of racial inquiry in fpe?

Such a response is even more confounding given the lessons of *Feminist Political Ecology*. Rocheleau et al. are explicit in arguing that fpe, as a conceptual framework for critiquing international development practice, must employ gender as “a critical variable in shaping resource access and control interacting with class, caste, race, culture, and ethnicity to shape processes of ecological change” (1996, p. 4). Thus while gender is one critical variable, we read this work as a plural approach open to incorporating many kinds of difference. Yet to date, and despite the fact that many studies name multiple axes of power in their fpe analyses, there remains a dearth of studies in fpe that engage racial power as mutually constitutive of gendered subjectivity.

In this article we seek to highlight this problem and to theorize a messier and more complex notion of gender in fpe. We begin by articulating our understanding of the overlapping concepts of race, racialization and whiteness. We follow with a review of work in fpe, highlighting and problematizing the tendency for a particularly narrow reading of gender, one that centers on sexual difference, gender roles and regimes of patriarchy, and that rarely moves beyond class/nature as entangled formations of gendered subjectivity. While we celebrate a focus on households, embodiments and everyday processes, we problematize fpe’s ambivalent relationship with difference. We suggest three key reasons for the endurance of this ambivalence: the political wariness associated with stressing differences amongst women, the privileges of whiteness within the academy, and the practical challenges of theorizing a messier notion of gender.

But our project is twofold, both reflective and (we hope) productive. Building on feminist geography and critical racial studies we argue for a *postcolonial intersectional analysis* in fpe. We define postcolonial intersectionality as a concept that moves beyond US based racial and gender hierarchies to acknowledge the way patriarchy and racialized processes (including whiteness) are consistently bound up in national and international development practice. This approach compels us to talk about the *power* of race and not just the *difference* of race. In developing this analysis we build on postcolonial subject formations as mutually constituted processes. We put this theory to work in an analysis of race, gender and whiteness in Honduras. With this postcolonial conceptual move, we argue that patriarchy and racism are mutually imbued in shaping human-environmental relationships, a point we hope will contribute to future fpe analysis.

2. Messing with gender: race, racialization and whiteness

Despite the popularity of gender within development circles, its political and analytical impact has lost its “critical edge” dulled by the “domestication” of gender in development policy (Cornwall, 2007; see also Loftsdottir, 2011). Part of the domestication is reflected in the way gender is rendered as a technical problem to be fixed rather than acknowledged as a source of oppression imbued in development itself (Loftsdottir, 2011; White, 2006). While the evolution of gender and development thinking considers the contested nature of gendered power relations in more sophisticated ways (Elmhirst, 2011a,b; Kabeer, 1994), there is an incongruity between the hyper-interest in women in both development studies and policy and the effectiveness in practice as poverty and marginalization remain disproportionately feminized (Jackson, 1996). Such inconsistencies in part owe to a failure to recognize that gendered-nature-societal relationships are not simply about material needs and access to natural resources. These relationships are shaped by particular regimes of cultural meaning that in turn shape social relations. As such, understanding these relationships demands a rigorous examination of how “capitalism, patriarchy and race/ethnicity shape and inform women’s subordination and oppression, and vice versa” (Chua et al., 2000, p. 823; Gururani, 2002).

This article builds upon the insights of a number of critical scholars working on deconstructing racial power through a myriad of themes: environmental justice, land and property struggles, biodiversity conservation, counter-mapping, racialization and indigenous geographies, media, transatlantic slavery and diaspora, historical geographies of empire and critical legal studies (Anderson, 2007; Domosh, 2006; Kobayashi and Peake, 2000; Kurtz, 2009; Pulido, 2000; Sundberg, 2008; Mollett, 2010, 2011; Mahtani, 2008, 2009; Mckittrick, 2006; Pratt, 2004; Price, 2010; Swarr and Nagar, 2004), as well as those political ecologists who have attended to the racialized processes of development discourses and practices of modernity (Jarosz, 1992; Kosek, 2004; Li, 2007; Moore, 2005; Neumann, 1997; Peluso, 2009; Vandergeest, 2003; Mollett, 2006, 2011).

We understand race as a shifting web of social signification that gives meaning to and represents social struggles and interests by highlighting human differences (Omi and Winant, 2000). While the fact that race is a social construction without biological foundation is commonly asserted (Bonnett and Nayak, 2003), this recognition does not disrupt the influence of racialization on human-social organization and regulation. Indeed, racism operates through an intricate and hegemonic web of signs and signifiers that prevail in contemporary societies throughout the globe (Murji and Solomos, 2005; Nayak, 2006). Outside of critical theory, and without genetic evidence, racial differences are stubbornly up held as natural and as such, “[r]ace serves to naturalize the groupings it identifies in its own name. In articulating the natural ways of being in the world and institutional structures in and throughout which such ways of being are expressed, race both establishes and rationalizes the order of difference as a law of nature” (Goldberg, 1993, 81). These webs of meanings spatialize, in part, through a myriad of racial categorizations and cultural signifiers (Anderson, 2007; De la Cadena, 2000; Sundberg, 2008). Thus, race is “more than colored bodies” (Kobayashi and Peake, 1994; Pulido, 2000, p. 15), it is pertinent to the production of social hierarchies and “prompts the exclusion of others by making it thinkable to deny or ignore their respective claims” (Goldberg, 1993 in Sundberg, 2008, p. 570).

Racialization, as the machinations of racism, refers to a process whereby human differences are accorded differential treatment based upon hierarchal and stereotypical discourses and imaginings (Anderson, 2007; Appelbaum et al., 2003, p. 2; Kobayashi and

Peake, 2000; Pulido, 2000). Processes of racialization unveil their historical constructions, which are built on presuppositions infused in racial discourse (Doty, 1996; Nayak, 2005). These discourses are shaped by the past while simultaneously drawing upon new and contemporary projects without decentering racialized hegemonic orderings (see Stoler, 2000). The spatiality of racial discourse demarcates conditions in which, “it becomes impossible to talk about sexuality, class membership, morality, and childrearing without talking about race” (Foucault, 1972, 144; see also Delaney, 2002). Racial discourse is mobilized as norms of civilization and modernity take shape throughout the global south and offer spatially and temporally distinct choices for Africans, Asians and Latin Americans. Namely “fixity and fluidity are basic to its [racialized] dynamic” (Stoler, 2000, 384) and unfold in everyday practices (Nayak, 2006; Stoler, 2000).

We would like to suggest then that fpe “mess” with gender by “doing race”, taking to heart Sundberg’s argument that “processes of racialization articulate in and through environmental formations and vice versa” (2008, 579).² This means more than simply working in or writing about communities of color. It necessitates recognition of the power inequities between the global north and global south, shaped by the legacies of colonial racisms, as well as (colonial) patriarchies. Yet the power of racialization is not limited to understanding oppression, but also privilege. Racialization makes visible the ways in which “white people live racially structured lives” where the category of white, as a racial signifier makes visible whiteness as a “hegemonic positioning” (Nayak, 2005, 147). As such, obscuring racial power in fpe reinforces the way in which the “racialization of black and brown bodies is implicitly tied to an unspoken understanding of whiteness” (Nayak, 2005, 158). To critically interrogate whiteness is NOT a critique of white people but recognition of whiteness as a “set of cultural practices and politics based on ideological norms that are lived but unacknowledged” (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000, 393). In these ways then, race is ALWAYS contextually appropriate for feminist political ecological analysis.

3. Feminist political ecology

While still on the margins, racialization and whiteness are increasingly acknowledged in the broader field of political ecology as important concepts for understanding the politics of the environment (Kosek, 2004; Peluso and Vandergeest, 2011; Mollett, 2006, 2011; Sundberg, 2008; Li, 2007; Vandergeest, 2003). However, this engagement is not widely reflected in the fpe literature. Nonetheless we argue fpe is well placed to examine racialized processes in the making of gendered subjectivities in the global south.³

Rocheleau et al. wrote that the “[a]symmetrical entitlements to resources—based on gender—constitute a recurring theme. Access to resources—whether by de facto or de jure rights, exclusive or shared rights, primary or secondary rights, ownership or use rights—proves to be an important environmental issue for women virtually everywhere” (p. 291). This and other works produced in the late 1980s and 1990s marked a moment in political ecology where the implicitly male “land manager” was insufficient for

understanding struggles over environmental change (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Carney, 1996; Rocheleau et al., 1996; Schroeder, 1996; Mackenzie, 1998). Instead, fpe as a promising subfield increasingly emphasized gender relations as an important shaper of resource struggles scaled from the state to the body. To date much of the work in fpe pays close attention to struggles over household resources, gender division of labor, and livelihood security as they unfold in everyday practices and engender body politics (Mackenzie, 1998; Gezon, 2006; Jarosz, 1999; Paulson and Gezon, 2005; Radel, 2012; Sultana, 2011; Truelove, 2011).

Such interrogations are critical to understanding how global development policies such as land titling, commercialized agricultural, resource extraction and urban restructuring impact men and women differently. An fpe focus on gender and household relations provides a nuanced conceptualization of gender relations in the context of development interventions nationally and internationally/ or “across scale”. For instance, as Carney writes, examining household dynamics “brings attention to the crucial role of family authority relations and property relations in structuring the gender division of labor and access to rural resources” (1996, p. 165). Her work outlining social and historical land use changes in the Gambian wetlands illustrates how women’s reduced control over wetlands takes place with a simultaneous devaluation of women’s labor and reveals that environmental and societal change are interwoven in rural Gambia (1996, 2004). In a similar way Schroeder and Suryanata investigate the ways women’s gardens in Gambia, a site of household reproduction, are threatened by male property holders looking to plant fruit orchards in these gardens, producing again intra-household conflict. Women’s gardens are made vulnerable to male claims because of patrilineal rules of Mandinka custom and their intersection with the paradoxical ambitions looking to “stabilize the environment through the market” (Schroeder and Suryanata, 1996, p. 200). In this work and others like it, fpe has privileged attention to gender roles, gender inequalities and patriarchy as they intersect with class dynamics in determining access to resources as well as the ways in which environmental rights and practices are gendered (Braidotti et al., 1994; Carney, 1996; Gezon, 2002, 2006; Hapke, 2001; Schroeder, 1993; Mackenzie, 1995; Paulson and Gezon, 2005). It is important to note that a focus on the household and environmental change challenges the disparate spheres of production and distribution evident in mainstream development economic thinking regarding household decision-making (Kabeer, 1994, p. 126). These studies also offer an excellent vantage point for understanding how “the forms of patriarchy present women with distinct ‘rules of the game’ and call for different strategies to maximize security and optimize life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression” (Kandiyoti, 1988, p. 274).

With a connected focus on the body, fpe scholarship exemplifies how gender subjectivities are in constant state of negotiation and articulation shaped by the myriad of social, political environmental contexts (Harris, 2006; Nightingale, 2006; Sundberg, 2004). Sultana’s work on water in Bangladesh, weaves gender and class social hierarchies in mapping struggles over access to water and uncontaminated tubewells. This work highlights how increased contamination of tubewells produces contradictory class relations as witnessed by women’s mobility and environmental responsibilities in collecting water. The necessity for wealthier families to collect water from safe tubewells owned by poorer families invert longstanding class hierarchies in Bangladesh and highlights that the “embodiment and spatial relations both enable and constrain certain relations to water” (Sultana, 2009, p. 439). Sultana also brings to the fore another embodiment besides well/ill being from safe or contaminated water but the “joys and relief” of procuring safe water come with the “pain, fear, despair, conflicts and overall sufferings for and from water” (Sultana, 2011). Gururani (2002)

² This term is common among human and cultural geographers to refer to someone who studies race. Its utterance is indicative of the push for geographers to study race, racialization and whiteness particularly outside urban social geographies.

³ Rather than an exhaustive review of the fpe literature, we selected to discuss only those scholars who explicitly work (and or write/present) in the subfield of political ecology and fpe more particularly as a basis for understanding and questioning the subfield. We do so to demonstrate how gender has remained the central category of analysis. Certainly, and as others point out (Elmhirst, 2011a,b), there is scholarship that resembles fpe and is often included in these debates. However we have chosen authors with an explicit engagement with fpe for this section only.

outlines the onset of bodily pain through everyday practices of forest collection in a similarly ambiguous way. While women remark of the pain of their everyday gendered responsibilities in the forest, at the same time they are quite proud of their work and the contributions they make to their households. This space of the forest provides both “pleasure and pain” in the unfolding of patriarchal relations in India (Gururani, 2002). In this way Ogra (2008) examines the costs of Human Wildlife conflict, meaning death and serious injury, for villages within the Rajaji-Corbett National Park, in Uttarakhand, India. Ogra (2008) argues that women possess a “disproportionate burden of the hidden costs” of human wildlife conflict that place women and children in unequal peril through frequent attacks by crop raiding elephants and other wildlife.

In this work, everyday environmental responsibilities i.e. safe water collection and forest collection, are “embodied practices” and shape particular gender subjectivities through the operation of securing environmental rights. But rights to natural resources also unfold through quotidian practices. As girls and women in Delhi slums have the responsibility to procure and manage household water or sanitation, their rights to that water (and spaces where water is located) are negotiated through a concomitant system of compromise, barter, exploitation and violence. Gendered practices of water management at the scale of the household reflect the unequal ways in which cities govern water resources and simultaneously produce inequality amongst its citizenry (Truelove, 2011).

These tales of livelihood struggles are not all tragic. Indeed, women’s empowerment and acknowledgement of women’s agency, however paradoxical in a variety of environmental struggles and tensions, remains a key focus in the fpe scholarship (Christie, 2006; Rocheleau et al., 1996; Sundberg, 2004; Harris, 2006; Rocheleau, 2008; Mollett, 2010). In the context of agrarian restructuring in Botswana, the push towards commercial production and agribusiness, has led women to embrace their traditional roles as small scale farmers where women participate in the commercial urban agriculture sector without the dependence on male relatives, such as in rural areas. While the sector put the squeeze on many rural families, women working as individuals are able to gain formal rights to land and to find indirect access to household necessities such as water. Moreover, because poultry farming is “women’s work”, low and middle-income women have been able to participate in the poultry subsector and are “ultimately making new claims over commercial agriculture production from which they have been largely excluded in Botswana” (Hovorka, 2006, 220). Here Hovorka (2006) explains that women welcomed their subjugated gender identities to “poultry” work as a way to resist exclusion from traditional male oppression in commercial agriculture. The women in Hovorka’s tale reflect what Nightingale (2011) refers to as “resilient contestations” whereby gender boundaries that would normally exclude women were “side-stepped”. Such a move complicates and challenges privilege in the distribution of development benefits. An attention to multi-scaled power dynamics, challenges to homogenous notions of community and household, and everyday embodied practices forms a good foundation upon which fpe is well placed to take on critical interrogations of environmental struggles where race and gender are mutually constituted.

4. Feminist political ecology and difference: challenges and openings

Like gendered oppression and patriarchal practice, race and racialization operate through everyday practices where struggles over rights and resources are spatialized in reference to and through presumed essence within racialized and gendered bodies. While fpe scholarship acknowledges the ways in which gender

power interacts with other forms of difference beyond class, and where ethnicity kinship, caste, nature and race are named (Asher, 2009; Sundberg, 2004; Gezon, 2006; Gururani, 2002; Paulson, 2005; Nightingale, 2006; Harris, 2006; Hapke, 2001; Sultana, 2009, 2011) very few analyses stray from privileging gender in shaping “the struggles of men and women to sustain ecologically viable livelihoods” (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 4).

Take for instance, the important work by Hapke and Ayyankeri (2004) on fisher folk in Kerala. These scholars examine the various shapings of urban–rural localities in the context of economic restructuring in the fishing sector. This work includes a description of how fisher folk, practicing a caste-based identity have “lagged considerably far behind the rest of Kerala society in terms of social and economic welfare and have ranked among the poorest communities in the state” (Hapke and Ayyankeri, 2004, p. 235). However there is no mention of the process through which caste power inequities creates choices/limits for women and men from Christian and Muslim fishing communities in Kerala. Instead, caste power is explained in economic terms while “gender norms and divisions of labor and their interactions with institutions, events and individualized household circumstances to create particular experiences of work for men and women” (p. 251), remain central to their argument. This is NOT a critique of Hapke and Ayyankeri’s work, but rather an example of the way gender is predominantly approached and positioned in the subfield of fpe. This piece reflects for us the prevailing ambivalence in the subfield towards difference since the 1990s with only a limited number of exceptions (see Nightingale, 2011; Sundberg, 2004).

Fpe continues to have an ambivalent relationship with difference and there are a number of reasons why this may be so. First, there is a longstanding political wariness around highlighting difference among women for fear that this will create infinite categories of experience and limit the ability to build coalitions and shape policy (Udayagiri, 1995). Indeed, some social scientists concerned with gender oppression have discouraged an overemphasis on “difference” and have argued the fact “that women cannot be treated as homogeneous need not belabored” (Meinzen-Dick et al., 1997; Udayagiri, 1995). From this perspective, a more singular gender framework, it is presumed, allows for and enables the creation of coalitions amongst women as a way to reproduce united narratives of gendered experience and oppression. Yet with this move, after Mohanty, the “discursively consensual homogeneity of “women” as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women” (1991, p. 56). This ambivalence around difference is also illustrated by the way fpe rarely accounts for how men and their gendered identities are shaped by racial, ethnic and caste racializations as positioned vis a vis development interventions at the village level and beyond. Feminist theory acknowledges the existence of “paradoxical space” occupying a place on the margin and the center simultaneously (Hooks, 1984; Rose, 1993; Collins, 1990). Such paradoxical spatialities occur for men too, as they may be at the patriarchal center of the household and village life, but due to their racialized identities in the nation, as tribal, black, nomadic and/or indigenous may simultaneously exist at the margin (Jarosz, 1992; Tsing, 2004; Li, 2007; Mollett, 2006, 2011). Such complexities have contradictory positions for women too (as we will illustrate later). After Mohanty, we argue that “the privileged positioning and exploratory potential of gender difference as the origin of oppression” is questionable (1991, p. 59).

Second, this paucity may be linked to operations of whiteness in our own scholarly knowledge production. In fact, our “whiteness” possibly constrains the recognition of race and racialization where we seek to understand struggles to secure natural resource access in the Global South. As Mahtani (2006, p. 22) notes, “much remains unspoken about how the prevalent whiteness of our institutional policies and practices influence the experiences of women of color

in geography". We would add that institutional whiteness influences ALL women to the point where the absence of race in fpe might appear "normal" and "benign" (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). Certainly, the fact that whiteness (as a cultural project) and white bodies (as phenotypical traits) remain the norm against which difference is fashioned, in geography and around the world (Bonnett, 1997, 2000; Kobayashi, 2006; Mahtani, 2006; Pulido, 2000, 2006; Sundberg, 2005) has shaped knowledge production. Such a history converges in a tendency for black and brown bodies to become the most common object of analysis (Collins, 1990; Mohanty, 1991).

In the AAG panel referenced in the introduction, gender was understood as shorthand for other differences. We find this troubling and while our reasons echo similar critiques of feminism articulated by women of color and Third World Feminists almost three decades prior, they are worth repeating. Indeed, as Crenshaw has argued, "it is fairly obvious that treating different things the same can generate as much inequality as treating the same things differently" (1997, 285). Obscuring race behind gender elicits the notion of a monolithic "women's experience" that unfolds autonomously with other social axes of power (Harris, 1997, 13). In a similar way "context", used to explain the relative silence on race in fpe, also obscures. Such camouflage exemplifies what Harris calls "nuance theory". Here the "commonality of all women" is presupposed so that "difference" is a matter of context or magnitude where "white women stand in for the normal or pure (essential) woman" (1997, 13; see also Mohanty, 1991). Furthermore to use gender as code for other kinds of differences ignores the hierarchical positions of fpe scholars and the communities about which we write. Such erasure reinforces "whiteness as the constitutive racial component of gender", what Gillman (2007) calls "a white cultural narrative of race" whereby race is placed beyond the arena of gender. In such narratives race intersects with gender oppression but in a way that obfuscates racial power, "keeping difference from making a difference" (2007, 120). While we too understand this may present a practical challenge the "problem occurs when thinkers reify their respective starting points and cease to examine the assumptions that frame them" (Collins, 2008, 71), a practice we believe marginalizes race repeatedly.

Lastly, this paucity of racial inquiry in fpe may be rooted in more practical barriers. We do not deny, as Collins has noted, that given the complexities of a truly intersectional analysis she has to "decide which systems of power to bracket as so-called background systems and which two or three entities of the pantheon of systems of power to emphasize in the foreground" (2008, 73). However, in light of the entanglements of race and gender, Crenshaw and Collins wrote from their own positionalities as African American women/activists/scholars and at a particular moment in US racial history and spatial landscape: democratic promises of individual freedom amidst persistent segregation. The fact that the specific racialized space from which they wrote and lived demanded an intersectional approach is important to feminist political ecologists to consider. It demonstrates that the operations of race are deeply spatial and temporal and as such may differ in the case studies we focus on. As such, for us "new feminist political ecologies" (Elmhirst, 2011a,b) would be richly served by careful theorizations of the "colonial present" articulated through race, racialization and whiteness as well as structural and enduring socio-economic inequalities between the Global North and South.

5. Postcolonial intersectionality

So, how can we think gender differently? Since its introduction in the 1980s, intersectionality remains a useful concept to best make sense of how "any particular individual stands at the crossroads of multiple groups" (Minow, 1997, 38 in Valentine, 2007,

12). The concept of intersectionality is credited to critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw who worked to understand race, gender, class, and ethnicity as interdependent and interlocking rather than disparate and exclusive social categories (1989). As Crenshaw writes "I used the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences" (1991, p. 144). Joined by other notable scholars and women of color, namely Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins, feminist theory could no longer ignore the mutual constitution of race and gender and their underpinning ideologies as a way to understand and write about women's subjugation. In particular, these feminists also sought to reveal the ways black women in the United States have been excluded from not only feminisms' intellectual project, but its political project as well, and sought a discursive and material attention to racial difference (Collins, 1990). This multi-scalar "buzzword" (Davis, 2008) highlights how gender and race are mutually constituted whereby their unstable dynamic is experienced simultaneously and therefore autonomous social categories cannot be simply added to the mix (Glenn, 1999; Gillman, 2007). (Alexander-Floyd, 2004; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992, pp. 62–63 in Valentine, 2007; Glenn, 1999; Gillman, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 195; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991).

With this in mind, we call for a *postcolonial intersectionality*. Postcolonial intersectionality acknowledges the way patriarchy and racialized processes are consistently bound in a postcolonial genealogy that embeds race and gender ideologies within nation-building and international development processes. This concept reflects the way women and men are always marked by difference whether or not they fit nicely in colonial racial categorizations, as cultural difference is also racialized (McEwan, 2001, p. 104; Radcliffe, 2005; Sundberg, 2008). Like postcolonial development geography seeks to decenter the material and symbolic legacies of the colonial period and serves as an important challenge to understanding north/south relations in simply economic terms (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996; Radcliffe, 2005), postcolonial intersectionalities in fpe would help better differentiate among women in the same way feminism was forced to confront its historical engagement with "imperialist origins" through the work of Mohanty, Hooks, Collins and many others (McEwan, 2001, p. 97). Postcolonial intersectionality addresses Mohanty's warnings against the construction of a "third world woman" and prioritizes a grounded and spatially informed understanding of patriarchy constituted in and through racial power.

6. Understanding race, gender and whiteness in Honduras: A postcolonial intersectional analysis at work

Explicit reference to racial power in fpe makes visible the mutual entanglement of race and gender. We draw on an example from ethnographic fieldwork in Honduras to illustrate the point and put a postcolonial intersectionality to work.⁴

6.1. Honduras

The Miskito people are an indigenous group who live in the Honduran Mosquitia region and share Amerindian, African and

⁴ This example emerges from ethnographic fieldwork conducted over 2 months in summer 2008. However, this work builds on a larger research project culminating in almost 24 months in the Mosquitia (Mollett, 2010, 2011). Ethnographic collection was supplemented by interviews (60 household interviews, 134 surveys, and more than 50 interviews with state personnel in areas of biodiversity conservation and development.) as well as historical data collection and discourse analysis of news media and government documents in Honduras. All names and some place names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

European ancestry. Such ancestry is embodied in visible racial mixes where people phenotypically appear black, white, indian, and a mixture of these and other racial heritages. In Honduras, the Miskito occupy a subjugated position in the context of Honduran racial hierarchies where the dominant ethnic identity, in number and in power, is the ladino. Ladino bloodlines (European ancestry) and cultural symbols such as Spanish language, western dress, sedentary land use practices, and urban residence are often equated with progress and modernity at the national level and are seen as superior to Miskito cultural practices such as swidden agriculture, Miskito language, subsistence production and forest residence inside the Mosquitia. As a result the Honduran state has historically tried to integrate the Mosquitia region and its natural resources through a continual devaluation of Miskito (and indigenous peoples) cultural and land use practices. Such practices are consistently subjugated and Miskito people's development contributions are historically placed in relation to *ladino* and white bodies (Mollett, 2011).

Since independence, the state has made a persistent attempt to populate the Honduran Mosquitia with Europeans, Americans and other "white" bodies through a number of legal, social and environmental measures. These development discourses operate in the name of civilization, integration, poverty reduction, sustainable development, multicultural reforms and land regularization (Mollett, 2011). State goals to "whiten" the Mosquitia build upon a broader regional political discourse known as *mestizaje*, which means racial mixing. This 19th and 20th century ideology posited racial mixtures as a form of racial improvement. Within the narrative it was assumed that blacks and indians would be elevated from elite imaginings of primitiveness, barbarism and backwardness and their concomitant cultural land use practices would be transformed. Inherent to this discourse is a racialized process known as *blanquiamiento* (or whitening) where citizenship was imbued with Creole (Mesoamerican born Europeans) ideals of "whiteness and masculinity" evidenced by "literacy, property ownership and individual autonomy" (Appelbaum et al., 2003, 4).⁵ Those rendered outside these ideals: Indians, blacks, mestizos and women while theoretically capable of social mobility, were presupposed as biologically and culturally inferior. This racialized subjectivity justified their exclusion from the rights as citizens and such ideals of whiteness were imbued in progress and modernity (Bonnett, 2000).

Presently this hierarchy unfolds on the north coast of the Honduran Mosquitia and inside the Rio Platano Biosphere Reserve. As a key aspect of sustainable development, the Honduran State under PROTEP, is looking to regularize the collective territories of the Reserve's indigenous peoples. Over the last 10 years, this has been a particularly contentious intervention since the state prefers to title lands individually. This is in contrast to Miskito claims for collective territorial demarcation. And while options for agricultural lands include collective arrangements, village lands are expected to be individuated, where ownership risks being reduced to a single "male" holder despite matrilineal and matriarchal customs in Nabeel (Mollett, 2010). These tensions over individual and collective land demarcation disclose the ways Miskito land practices are racialized vis a vis *ladino campesinos*, elite commercial farmers and the state and gendered, in part, in the ways in which land encroachments are led by *ladino* men. At the same time, state practice assumes Miskito men as the beneficiaries of land registration. In this context, as postcolonial intersectionality makes clear "it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is inevitably produced and main-

tained." (Butler, 1990, p. 3). We illustrate with an excerpt from fieldnotes.

Lina and Alia are Miskito women from the Miskito village of Nabeel. Nabeel is located on the Atlantic coast inside the Reserve's cultural zone home to the roughly twenty thousand Miskito peoples and other indigenous peoples. Farming and wage labor are the main livelihood activities. The majority of Miskito people self-identifies as poor and uses various signifiers to define a Miskito identity. Widows in their sixties, Lina and Alia are both mothers with young children living in their homes. As both women are well known, local discourse often describes these widows as "*viejitas*" an affectionate way to describe an old lady. In relation, both women commonly complain of illness, aching feet, hands and having a "weak body", ailments that render them motionless for days on end. While, village narratives represent both *viejitas* as "needy" and "weak", the local hierarchies of race and religion situate them differently in both ideological and material ways.

6.2. Lina

Lina is Miskito with dark brown skin and long, black, straight hair. She lives with her two sons in the coastal community of Nabeel. Lina's youngest son is twelve and attends the local elementary school. While her middle son Tonio has work through the lobster industry, according to Lina "he often drinks his salary". Throughout research in Nabeel, Lina often described herself as "very poor". She, like other Miskito women, often raised her hands and proclaimed "that God will lift [her] out of this misery". In the meantime, Lina sells fruit harvested from four enormous fruit trees (mango and plum) inherited from her parents.

In addition to *viejita*, Lina's neighbors describe her as "poor" "hardworking" and "persistent". Lina has earned her status as a "hard worker" through her work cleaning the offices of a local NGO and the laundry services she provides the NGO staff and their guests. She is also known to clean the homes of foreign volunteers and development workers who rent homes within the village. For Lina, employment with foreigners is "better than working for a Honduran". Foreigners "always give you extra, invite you to eat with them and you can often take something home for the next day". While Lina is happy to have her job at the NGO, the unpredictable cycles of international development funding means that "sometimes I work for months at the NGO and then nothing". Lina explicitly links her vulnerability to intense poverty to being a widow, which she insists leaves her "disadvantaged". She adds "if my husband was alive, I wouldn't have to pay for a *mozo* (field laborer) to clear and fence my land and we would always have food on the table". In Nabeel, the "poor are women like me, alone without a man to clear the land". Lina's claim that poverty is embodied in women "without men to clear the land" is common refrain in Nabeel.

Lina's poverty narrative situates her in a gendered division of labor where Miskito men customarily clear land and women plant seeds and harvest food alongside male relatives. While fencing is relatively new in Nabeel, fence building is considered a male activity. In addition, her reliance on male labor, for clearing and fencing also reveals the contextual limits to matriarchal land rights in Nabeel. While Lina's land was inherited from her mother, her ability to maintain this land is in peril in the context of impending land regularization. Land competition in the village is at its highest and new land is impossible to locate. These tensions make Lina's uncleared and unfenced lands vulnerable to encroachment, by Miskito and non-Miskito men. Such vulnerability is not simply because she is a *viejita*, but because mandatory land registration increases state intervention and concomitant tenure rules, like clearing and fencing lands to show possession (practices more common to ladino land use practices) (see Mollett, 2006). Furthermore for Lina,

⁵ We follow (Anderson, 2000) in writing indian with an "i" to illustrate indian as a racial category like black.

her inability to access male labor may mean even if she can formally register her village plot in her own name, formalization does not secure her access to her parcel as her access to land as a *viejita* remains dependent on male labor (either remunerated or bartered). As fpe scholars note, such struggles commonly emerge as a result of changing agrarian reform (Jarosz, 1992, 1999; Carney, 1996, 2004; Elmhirst, 2011b). However, gendered (and aged) vulnerability to displacement is provoked by land registration in Nabeel. State pressure to regularize Miskito lands are imbued with racialized processes of development, where a single model of Euro American ideals for land individuation is part of a broader spatialized genealogy of whitening imbued in nation-building. This genealogy shapes the everyday practices of Lina's racialized and gendered subjectivity as an indigenous Miskito *viejita* in the Mosquitia.

According to the local health clinic, Lina's poverty narrative is common. The Nabeel Health clinic reports that single mothers make up roughly 30% of Nabeel households (Mollett's fieldnotes 2008). While most villagers call themselves "poor" and "humble" (*humilde*) there is consensus that "single mothers" (*madres solteras*) and widows are "those who struggle most" in Nabeel and are often described as "*pobrecitas*" (poor little ones), seen as the village's "needy population". At first glance, village consensus appears to support Lina's poverty narrative. However, ad hoc conversational interviews and village gossip present Lina's case in a different light. Instead, village discourse suggests that Lina "struggles" because she "is in bed with the devil". In 1999, the Moravian Church, after almost 200 years of unified practice, divided into two sects throughout most villages inside the Mosquitia. This split was a violent and galvanizing process that divided families and communities. Those that mobilized a separation from the church, known as *Renovados* (Renewed Moravians) became more evangelical and many believed themselves to be "prophets". *Tradicionales* (Traditional Moravians) rejected this evangelical move and warned villagers against believing in "false prophets". Instead *Tradicionales* blamed this mobilization on "greed" and "ignorance" led by a younger and more "selfish" Miskito generation. Reinforcing this critique, in 2000, the *Renovada* leadership was able to secure control over US donations that were still funneling in since Hurricane Mitch pummeled Honduras in 1998. *Renovados* were accused of becoming "thieves" and being "sneaky like *los morenos*." *Los morenos* refers to the Garifuna, an afro-indigenous community who lives in close proximity to Nabeel. While the *Renovados* were able to mobilize foreign donations, by 2001, initial energy for this mobilization began to wane as people decided that they missed their families and their community and "didn't want to be mad anymore". This collective epiphany overwhelmingly saw people return to the Traditional church. A former *Renovado* suggests "we are all Moravians and stronger together than divided". As a consequence, those who had participated in the split were now seen with much suspicion.

For Lina, her decision to become a *Renovada* made her the subject of village rumors that posited her as a "harlot" and "bad mother". According to many villagers, *Renovado* church seminars were often held at a neighboring village overnight. As one Miskito woman expressed "*las morenas* sleep outside the house, they are easy and foolish, but a Miskito woman sleeps in her home with her family she is a good girl, a good mother". Again, Lina's behavior is understood through Miskito stereotypes about Garifuna women. These racial ideologies are infused with a devaluation of blackness (despite African ancestry among the Miskito). Other rumors posit her decline as inevitable due to the fact she was "too *india*" and "followed bad influences." These narratives together draw upon colonial racial hierarchies that essentialize indians as "docile" and "obedient" and blacks as wild and "hardheaded" (Mollett, 2006).

Lina's active racialization was not simply discursive, but material. Prior to the split, Lina enjoyed credit at many of the small home stores in Nabeel because she was a cousin of a well-respected *Tradicional* Moravian elder and because "everybody knew she worked for the *gringos*, she had a good job".⁶ But shortly after the split Lina temporarily lost her job at the NGO (which remained aligned with the Traditional church) and at the same time her access to credit in village shops was abruptly cut. In reflecting on this horrible moment, Lina laments that she is even disrespected by the village children, who compete with her in gathering fallen fruit from the HER fruit trees and call her "*tonta vieja*" (dumb old lady) as her ailing body makes it impossible for her to chase them away. Lina's village status and her racialized gender subjectivity are remade through religious and generational logics. While once admired and granted credit for being close to white foreigners, Lina is now racialized through stereotypical narratives regarding blackness and indianness. While a genealogy of these discourses point to a time and space dominated by Euro-American postcolonial ambitions embodied in state practice, the contemporary naturalizations of racial hierarchies are also fulfilled by Miskito society and shape Lina's ability to access and formalize her customary rights to land and natural resources in Nabeel.

6.3. Alia

To be sure racial and gendered subjectivities do not only close opportunities for environmental rights. Like Lina, Alia is a Miskito widow in her mid-sixties. She is also referred to as *una viejita* and people often refer to her as "almost white" in reference to her light skin color. Alia is raising her two grandsons, but unlike Lina, villagers insist that Alia "doesn't have to struggle" because people like to help Alia, "she is good". Alia is referred to by many as "*una viejita con fuerza*" (a little old lady with fight). While she no longer works her land, her brother, a farmer brings her a variety of produce from her land for household consumption and to sell in her small home store.

Alia's favorable status in Nabeel is shaped by both the logic of religious and racial ideologies specific to the Mosquitia, informed by global interactions. For many villagers, Alia does better than most widows and single mothers because even after her husband's death (a well-loved Bishop from the Traditional Moravian Church), she remains a "Bishop's wife". For another villager waiting in line to speak with Alia, "Alia is fortunate; God granted her 'white skin' so that people will always help her even when she doesn't ask for it". Like Lina, Alia considers herself to be poor. She often refers to the incomplete construction of her home as evidence of her poverty. Despite the house, Alia admits that "[she] was blessed to marry a bishop because his work brought white people from around the world to Nabeel to pray, eat and learn ways to understand Miskito culture". This conflation of blessing and whiteness is common. According to a nurse in Kari, an up river farming community, "I once had a patient insist that I bring her to the coast to see Alia because they believed that angels visited Alia with strong medicine". The "angels" in this story were white missionaries from the US and Europe bringing medicines on church funded medical missions. The patient insisted that by being in Alia's home, "God would be close to where the white people are as they never get sick" (personal communication Feb 2005). In a similar vein, a well-known Miskito woman doctor, who describes herself as a "white Miskito" describes Alia's house as "*sana*" (clean and pure) and fit for "*meriki*" (foreigners) and the "educated".⁷ Such affinity for whiteness is

⁶ Gringo is the Spanish term for foreigner. In Honduras this is first assumed to be white.

⁷ It must be noted this Miskito term is also racialized, similar to "gringo". Both terms in Honduras refer to specifically white foreigners. In particular "meriki" in reference to the author was always followed by *sixsa*, which means "black" in Miskito.

not masked by Alia's enthusiasm and her tales of past and present visitors, namely missionaries, researchers and tourists, all of whom, as described by Alia, are "hablas ingles, ninos de Dios y blanco" (English speaking, children of God and white).

The ways in which Alia's privilege is justified by her (almost) white phenotype and affiliation with the Traditional Moravian church vis a vis Lina, exemplifies how the concept of intersectionality is useful in illustrating how space and processes of subject formation are fluid and inextricably bound. While both stories tell the ways in which Miskito gender relations are ripe in Nabeel (i.e. how Miskito women look to men to help support and maintain farming and access to land) faith, age and particularly race help explain the different lived experiences of these two *viejitas* in Nabeel. While both describe themselves as poor Miskito women, Lina's choice to support a faction of the Moravian church that soon became seen as "sucia" (dirty) informed her racialization as paradoxically "promiscuous" and "too docile". Her new status undermined her ability to be self-sufficient and maintain access to her land and credit as it was now thinkable (due to racializing/gendered logics) among villagers in Nabeel to marginalize her.

In contrast, Alia's favorable status in the village as "clean", "moral" and "educated" (even though Alia was pulled from formal education in the second grade) is upheld through continuous relations with white foreigners. This status garnished both her brother's labor and access to land and natural resources. In fact, when the local municipal official came to Nabeel to register her village land in the context of state's land regularization program the local official enthusiastically registered her land in her name, and never collected the fee from her (Mollett's fieldnotes 2008). Such "Anglo-affinity" (whiteness) (Hale, 1994) in the Miskito geographic imagination secures both symbolic and material outcomes, for Alia, and in particular access and rights to land.

These stories demonstrate the extent to which racialization and whiteness are relevant to feminist political ecological analysis. Postcolonial intersectionality, in this regard, permits us to understand the different lived experiences of the *Viejitas* not as stable or given forms/structures but as "situated accomplishments" (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). As Lina and Alia actively negotiate, contest and acquiesce to differential forms of power hierarchies, "the intersections of identities" blur rather than reinforce the boundaries of social categorization (Valentine, 2007, p. 14). In particular, theorizing intersectionality as a process of postcolonial becoming and unbecoming makes visible the ways in which whiteness shapes material and ideological possibilities and racialized genders emerge out of the everyday practices of livelihood and natural resource struggles in Nabeel. A postcolonial intersectionality contests designations of legible forms of the dominant and the subaltern. Lina and Alia are not simply "needy", Moravian or "old" women compelled to make "strategic bargains". Instead the power of racial logics that shape religious conflict and struggles over land marginalize one widow and privilege another.

Postcolonial intersectionality fits well with the aims of fpe to "build an approach towards power relations taking into full account not only male dominance, but mainstream and privileged attitudes and control over the environment" (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 306). Gender and race are a historically important coupling that shapes and is shaped by space. Take the "myth of virgin land" in former "colonies" where women, and land are posited in the colonial texts to be "discovered", "named" and "owned" and where indigenous peoples are made invisible by male conquerors; Or the entanglements of race and gender in the spaces of the Auction Block in the history of transatlantic slavery where central to its reproduction was the "black women's body as a fertile commodity of exchange" (McKittrick, 2006). And today where national ideologies premised on homogenous or heterogeneous citizenry both rely on the active policing of women's sexuality and bodies. As

McClintock writes, the co-production of race and gender as degenerative tropes brought about a particular modern form of racialized hegemony by the late 19th century (1995). These legacies live on and are simultaneously contested and reentrenched in the everyday material and discursive practices of survival and natural resource management in Honduras and elsewhere. As Asher notes in reference to violent displacements in Colombia, *Afro-Colombiana* resistance "emerges in the context of multifaceted, inter-twined, and mutually constitutive relations of power of gender (as women) of race or culture (as black) of class (as poor people) and of location (as rural Pacific residents" (Asher, 2009, p.152). With this in mind, we argue for a *postcolonial intersectionality* in fpe, attentive to the changing and unstable contradictions of racial and gender "identities in the making" (Sundberg, 2004) in a way that illustrates the messy, conflicting and partial makeup of the subjectivities that we encounter.

7. Conclusion: race and gender

The mutual constitution of gender and race remains understudied and on the margins. Thus we argue that this entanglement be moved to the fore. Taking heed of the mutual entanglements of this coupling communicates that people in the global south do not exist in separate worlds or "contexts" from our own, but that the racist structures and inequalities that shape their lives shape ours too. We too are historically and spatially constituted subjects woven in racialized and gendered relationships of power in relation to those we write about. For now we humbly suggest that future work in fpe reflect how gender does NOT act alone "as an optic for analyzing the power effects of the social constitution of difference" (Elmhirst, 2011a,b; see also Cornwall, 2007). In fact, fpe needs race. This is crucial, not simply because race and racialization are understudied and development problems require explanations and strategies found outside political economic reforms, but for the sake of gender as well. Indeed, increased attention to race may open more critical analysis of natural resource control, distribution and access as a way to help "mainstream" gender in development policy and planning, in a more meaningful and plural fashion. It will force us to see race in places we tend to take as raceless i.e. the environment. Fpe cannot dismiss race as a matter of "context". For "context", is shaped by "the inheritance of the colonial aftermath" (Gandhi, 1998, x). In fact it is an attention to context that compels us to pay attention to race in the realm of environmental politics. Without such engagement our work remains ahistorical and out of place and the women of color we so often write about will always be required to select fragments of themselves to garnish as wholeness (see also Harris, 1997).

Finally fpe is well positioned to theorize the co-constitution of race, gender and the environment (Sundberg, 2004; Nightingale, 2011; Mollett, 2010). So, we posit a post-colonial intersectionality as a way to "mess with gender" – to re-theorize it in such a way that refuses to silence, elide or side-step race but instead accommodates a more complex understanding of the entanglement of racialized and gendered power. This approach demands an acknowledgment of the postcolonial moment of development's interventions in the global south. And it is a stance that feminist political ecology is well positioned to, and must, take on.

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