

Territories of risk and mobilisation: Gender based violence, climate and environmental change in Colombia, Nigeria and the Philippines



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Outline

- Brief review of the current state of knowledge
- Research aim and methodology
- Case study from Colombia
- Preliminary conclusions



*“The study of gender-based violence is to study humanity”
(Wies & Haldane, in Petillo & Hlavka 2022)*

Introduction

The relationship between climate and environmental change and gender-based violence (GBV) is increasingly recognised (e.g., IPCC 6th assessment). In literature, we see the following themes:

- **Increasing temperatures, climate variability:** e.g. increasing domestic violence, controlling and coercive behaviour, harassment, sexual violence, child marriage, kidnapping and trafficking – often linked to increased household stress, vulnerability, and risky practices - traveling further for food and water resources.
- **Natural disasters/extreme weather:** e.g. events create contexts that heighten GBV risk - power outages, failure of mobile networks, crowded shelters, lack of rule of law.
- **Climate-scarcity-driven conflicts:** e.g., household conflicts to humanitarian scales; leading to IPV, physical and sexual violence, trafficking, kidnapping, often related to displacement e.g., in the Sahel and Lake Chad regions in west/central Africa.
- **Natural resource exploitation:** violence (namely physical, sexual, harassment, assassinations) used in mining, fishing and logging sectors to reinforce privilege and control over resources. Increasing violence against environmental defenders. Linked to issues of poor governance.

Gender just landscapes

Conceptual Approach

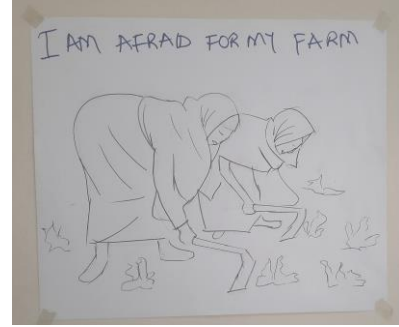
Multi-country action research drawing on feminist political ecology (relations between body, gender, nature and society)

Research Questions

What are women's experiences of GBV linked to climate and environmental change? Are women responding and preventing violence? How?

Methods

Trauma informed, arts-based, with literature review, key informant interviews, focus groups with activists and survivors



Colombia (2): post-peace agreement; historic and ongoing violence	Embodied somatic practices and engagement with nature
Nigeria (2): protracted crisis	NE Nigeria: Storytelling and illustration; SS Nigeria: Photography and open discussion
Philippines (1): post-peace agreement	Participatory mapping (3D) and storytelling



What did our research team learn about risk?

1. Women experienced a continuum of violence at different scales. In every case, women related the violence they experienced to structural violence. The deep inequality was considered a form of systemic oppression linked to the production of environmental degradation and capitalist accumulation (Mollett & Faria 2013; Bigger et al. 2018; Voyles 2018; Sultana 2020)
2. Violence is embedded in social relations creating 'ruptured fabrics' within territories and enables exploitation of territory, labour and identity. 'Environment' or 'socio-nature' is "an extension of and extends into the body as a site of material reproduction and ecological impact" (Nightingale 2011:155).
3. Power (physical, discursive etc) is used over and about women, devaluing their status and roles, enabling violence to be 'justified', which is linked to broader patriarchal, colonial and racialised structures particularly around the creation of property.





What did our research team learn about agency?

1. Interwoven in these experiences were important forms of resistance and agency. In all contexts, women and girls were developing ways to reduce risk of violence and provide mutual support. This is harder in contexts of displacement (NE Nigeria, Philippines).
2. Women's activism connects the dots between women's status, human rights and environmental degradation. 'Big infrastructure' (oil & gas, dams) invokes further interpersonal and structural violence.
3. Emotional and gendered labour can themselves be a site/practice of violence – but are also where women's agency is exerted (women protecting men in Colombia, naked protests in SS Nigeria). However, it can incur backlash from communities and officials (Colombia).



Mocoa, Putumayo

16 women survivors and activists shared stories during a forest walk. Women took different roles in the process - photography, cuenteras, and collectors of nature for collective artwork – to create their individual and collective narratives of the situation in their communities.

March 17, 2017

Avalanche and floods killed over 200 people. Many link the event to extractivism and climate change.

Fatalities were highest for those who were poor and lived in temporary structures along the river (female-headed households, migrants, IDPs, Indigenous and Afro-descendant people)

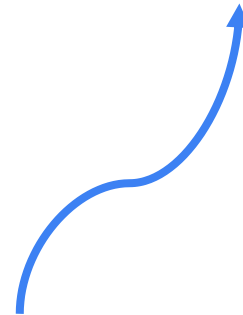
Women described sexual harassment and abuse in the shelters.

One participant (activists, journalist) uncovered the disappearance of at least seven children from a shelter.

Violence in families and the community worsened after the event, related to stress and hopelessness from the lack of food, clean water and jobs.



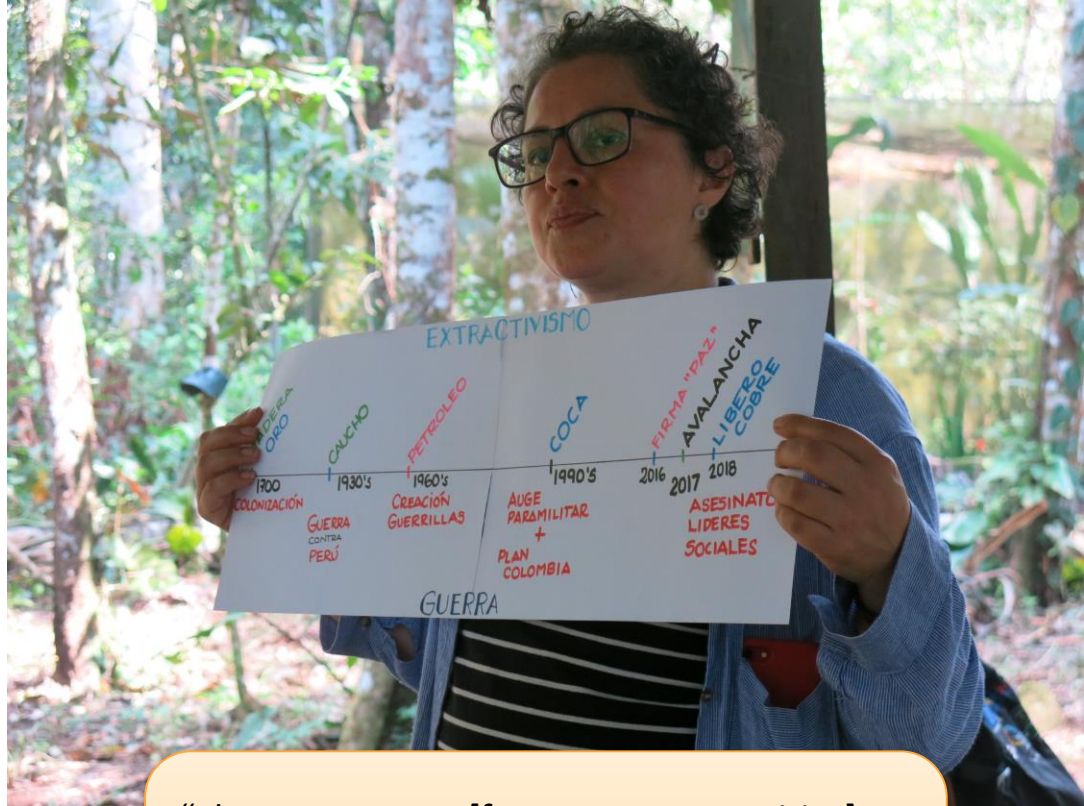
Denuncian que siete niños, dados por desaparecidos, fueron robados en la tragedia de Moca



Women linked the disaster and ensuing violence to the long history of extractive industries and militarisation of the region.

This caused continual environmental damage, displacement and violence between different factions which fuelled and fuelling corrupted governance.

Women expressed how this ruptured the social fabric of their communities and in this context they provided the 'care'.



“Those resources [from our communities] have been supplying wars... and women deal with the aftermath”
-female youth activist

Reproductive and emotional labour and violence

“Campesinos or urban people call us “lazy” because we don’t deforest for cattle, or because we don’t have a palm oil plantation. [But] it is because we know. We believe in balance, we know the kind of plants we have to grow, how they grow together, like people, like community. Our lands are ourselves”

-female Indigenous leader

“They dare to call me illegal... I break my back day after day shoveling sand, but they do not consider [it] illegal that a foreign company comes and destroys large areas. They (foreign companies) pay for the government’s silence”

-Indigenous women, artisanal miner



The Government solution was new infrastructure, a technical 'solution' to address extreme events.

“When we talk about the reconstruction of [our communities] we talk about brick, cement, houses, bridges, but we do not talk about the human fabric.”
-female participant



*“Women are like water.
We also have the right to overflow.”*

— forest walk participant, Putumayo

Desbore – the overflow of water – was a literal and metaphorical translation that women used to articulate their struggle with violence:

- Men’s overflow of emotions based on resentment, anger and frustration which produces GBV within their households
- Violence on their bodies due to stress, emotional and physical labour, related to structural violence
- Violence within communities (including against protesters) related to large scale mining and militarisation
- Collective belief that nature ‘Pachamama’ is overflowing to retaliate/ rebalance due to environmental exploitation

Women's collective action



"Thanks to the solidarity of people, I knew that people have sympathies towards me. So, I have been able to build a small room for us. One woman gave me some timber, other a lump of cement... another person came over one day and helped me with the ceiling. I have received lots of collaboration and love"
- female participant

Women's collectives are addressing the interconnective forms of violence

- Women's organisations mainly operated to address GBV and human rights, but were also leading the protests against private sector, provided emergency response and support for women to rebuild longer-term
- Formal commitment of women's civil society organisations e.g. 'Tejedoras de Vida' to incorporate environmental and climate change concerns.
- "Guardianas del agua", environmental defenders of Putumayo, extended their efforts to encompass the broader Andean-Amazonia region.

Preliminary conclusions

- Different, interconnected forms of violence are used against women and girls in contexts where environmental and climate uncertainty are growing. The root causes of violence are embedded in (the imagined) territories and the social relations at different scales.
- This troubles simplified notions of risk (e.g., women only being at risk while being mobile = water) and is not necessarily addressed through infrastructure and quotas for women's participation in natural resource governance bodies.
- However, drawing on the power of emotional connections made through shared experience and labour, we found that women are actively involved in creating alternatives and community responses for violence prevention, women's rights and ecological repair.
- We have a lot to learn from women's everyday experiences and their collective responses. What is needed is the creation of new relations with decision makers and environmental governance institutions in different spatial landscapes (e.g., climate and food systems sectors have largely ignored GBV) where women themselves can present their experiences on their own terms.

British Academy: ‘Entangled Forests - Women’s climate action in the Brazilian Amazon and the Philippines’

Two-year project examining women’s activism in key sectors

Arts & Humanities Research Council UK: ‘Hitting the ground- an international arts-led transdisciplinary partnership to address GBV in food systems through a body/story/environment approach’

Three-year project examining violence in food systems in Colombia’s rice triangle and cassava and fish value chains in Cross-Rivers Nigeria

Thank you

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