Revealing the patriarchal sides of climate change through feminist critical discourse analysis: a case study from Nicaragua

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Abstract:
My paper explores the potentials of feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar 2007) for the understanding of how hegemonic power relations and ideology in climate change policies reproduce unequal gender hierarchies. I illustrate my arguments with a critical analysis of the discursive gendering of climate change policies of one of the world's most climate change affected countries: Nicaragua. An intersectional perspective that seeks to highlight how factors of privileges and disadvantages can be reproduced in this case through climate change discourses informs my textual analysis of the Nicaraguan climate change policy. This textual analysis is put in dialogue with the results of my ethnographic study of the social practices that occur around the implementation of these policies in two Nicaraguan rural communities. First, my findings show that the ambivalent process and the tenuous results of the discursive gendering of climate change policies and interventions in contemporary Nicaragua does not engage with the root causes of gendered vulnerabilities. By deconstructing both the masculinist and eco-feminist character of climate change policies and interventions in Nicaragua, and unveiling the discursive and practical techniques through which they reproduce patriarchy, my paper strengthens the call for more feminist discourse analytical research on climate change.

Keywords: Climate change, feminist critical discourse analysis, gender, environmental discourse, Nicaragua.

Introduction

Feminist critical discourse analysis (feminist CDA) is of particular importance in the field of climate change in which discussions about gender (when gender is included) are still too often exclusively about the extent to which women are excessively affected by climate change. Despite a recent opening to overcome the sole examination of gendered vulnerabilities seen as a direct effect of decreasing possibilities to access natural resources (IPCC 2014, e.g.), climate change policies that include gender issues are still not obligatorily written and implemented from a feminist perspective. For feminist scholar Sherylin MacGregor working on environmental topics, the lack of feminist research on gender and climate change stemming in part from gender-blindness in environmental research and a reciprocal environmental issues blindness in feminist research presents the risk that the way climate change is addressed reproduces hegemonic masculinities (2010). I argue that this is particularly true in climate change politics, making it urgent to understand how they produce and regulate gender and other types of oppressions.

Feminist critical discourse analysis can be particularly useful for this endeavor. Michelle M. Lazar situates feminist CDA at the nexus of critical discourse studies and feminist scholarship. For her, feminist CDA has the potential to "advance a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining a (hierarchically) gendered social order" (Lazar 2005b, 1). My intention in this paper is to illustrate some of the ways in which the gendering of current environmental and climate change politics reinforce gendered and other types of oppressions in rural Nicaragua.

Environmental Policy for a Sustainable Economic Growth[1]" and "Protection of Mother Earth, Climate Change Adaptation and Integral Management of Disaster Risks[2]": these are the titles of the sections relative to environmental policies in the main public policy documents of Nicaragua written respectively in 2003 and 2012. They are reflective of the discursive rupture conveyed by the transition in 2007 from a neoliberal (1990-2007) to a post-neoliberal regime (2007-nowadays), from the market oriented neoliberal narrative on the environment seen as manageable towards a gendered human development discourse that defies the conceptual divide between humans and the environment. In the first section of this paper, I present the Nicaraguan post-neoliberal context in which gender is omnipresent in the climate change policy discourse. My theoretical and methodological approach is presented in Section 2. In Section 3, I highlight the gendered consequences of the shift from an environment seen as manageable during the neoliberal epoch towards nature seen as our 'own mother' in post-neoliberal Nicaragua. In the fourth section, I show how this paradigmatic shift changed the way rural women are included in environmental management and climate change adaptation in rural communities. In section 5, I discuss the consequences of the fact that while during the neoliberal era non governmental organizations (NGOs) were in charge of promoting gender equality in the environmental field, this responsibility has been taken up by the State in post-

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[1] La Política Ambiental Para un Crecimiento Económico Sostenible.
[2] La Protección de la Madre Tierra, Adaptación Ante el Cambio Climático y Gestión Integral de Riesgos y Desastres.

neoliberalism. Finally, I highlight the major impediments and some opportunities for a feminist response to climate change in current post-neoliberal Nicaragua.

Gender and climate change in Nicaraguan post-neoliberal politics

The omnipresence of women in the climate change policy discourse

In Nicaragua three important features distinguish current post-neoliberal politics (2007-nowadays) from previous neoliberal ones (1990-2007): (i) increased efforts to reduce poverty and exclusion, central concerns in social policies and not seen as possible through the trickle-down effects of economic growth; (ii) the environment is not seen as only supposed to serve economic growth, rather it is conceptualized as mutually constitutive with humans and; (iii) encouragement of citizen participation in decision- making and service delivering. In particular, women are made visible in the policy discourse and seen through their figures of nurturing mothers when it comes to environmental management.

Gender related measures and policies implemented since the beginning of the post-neoliberal regime placed recently the country in incredibly eloquent positions: out of 142 countries, Nicaragua is ranked sixth in terms of the Global Gender Gap Index[3] (2014) and fourth concerning the political participation of women. Poor, rural, indigenous, small-entrepreneur women have never had as much visibility in the Nicaraguan public discourse as since 2007 in which they are predominantly pictured as having a 'special connectedness' to nature, making them particularly apt to implement for example agricultural activities targeted towards climate change adaptation (e.g. Nicaraguan Government 2010; Nicaraguan Government 2012).

However, together with other feminist scholars working in Nicaragua (e.g. Cupples 2004; Kampwirth 2008) and the majority of the feminist activists I interviewed in the country, I argue that these policies and measures, while they integrate gender considerations, do not reflect a feminist perspective. The eloquent ranking of Nicaragua in terms of gender equality hides a context in which women's participation in decision-making spaces is not always the result of their empowerment nor does it contribute to empowerment in the majority of the cases. The inclusion of women in development, environmental and climate change discourses is done through their 'traditional' gender roles of cooking, taking care of the children and the elderly, as well as of fetching firewood and water, and through the widespread assumption that they are a homogeneous group particularly apt to execute environmental management.

Climate change adaptation as a national priority

Nicaragua is the third country in the world according to the 2013 Climate Risk Index (CRI), which reflects its high exposure to extreme climatic events both in terms of fatalities as well as economic losses that occurred between 1992 and 2011 (Harmeling and Eickstein 2012). In this context, the Nicaraguan government identifies climate change adaptation as one of its key priorities (Campos Cubas et al. 2012; IPCC 2007). However, this prioritization is not reflected in terms of the attention and the investments international institutions give to adaptation in Nicaragua. According to the report of the Nicaraguan research institute Centro Humboldt, climate change

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[3]After Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark respectively.

mitigation projects in the country were assigned 90% of the available funds for climate change between 2005 and 2011. Furthermore, the actions supporting climate change adaptation not only are deployed in insufficient number, but also over-emphasize its material impacts, and are mainly interested in assessing the quantifiable effects of the occurring changes. According to feminist scholar Sherylin MacGregor, the risk with having the main focus on the material effects of climate change is that technical solutions for adaptation tend to be put forward (2010)[4], overlooking the need for social changes. Moreover, she states that the growing attention to climate change has given scientists and policymakers an increased role in scientific debate and action (MacGregor 2010, 230). This has led to the strengthening of a top-down approach to climate change, as opposed to an approach that would give importance and voice to the ones who are confronted with its effects on a daily basis like the farmers (MacGregor 2010).

In contemporary Nicaragua, the 'miraculous' solution to climate change resides for research institutes with important and historical presence in the country, and the policy-makers these research institute support, in cocoa production. Indeed, the replacement of coffee and husbandry both in crisis attributed to climate change by cocoa with high demand on the international market, appears to be an easier task than to question unequal power relations that contribute to the degradation of natural resources through deforestation, land and water grabbing. In this context in which climate change adaptation is not enough funded and actions are giving priority to 'technological' solutions, the inclusion of women's efforts present an important benefit: climate change adaptation actions become part of their caring roles as women are constructed as naturally apt to address climate change.

Feminist critical discourse analysis of climate change as theory and practice

Feminism in critical environmental discourse analysis

To the question, 'why is there a need for a feminist approach to CDA?' when CDA by definition is known for engaging with unequal power relations and adopting overt political stances, Michelle M. Lazar gives three main elements of response (2007, 143). First, she explains that feminist approach to CDA bring a specific interest in highlighting the discursive obstacles that impede transforming existing unequal gender relations (2007, 143). In the Nicaraguan context, this is all the more important as contemporary climate change politics include concerns for gender, however, as I show it throughout this paper, this inclusion is not feminist in this critical sense. Second, she underscores that the feminist approach in CDA encourages a systematic analysis of the "seemingly innocuous yet oppressive nature of gender as an omni-relevant category in many social practices"(2007, 143). As I will show later, this is a characteristic of climate change discourses in Nicaragua as women and men are discursively paired in a relationship in which women end up by bearing most responsibilities in the fight against climate change. Third, it is also a political stance to make visible the feminist character of the CDA I am undertaking. As Michelle M. Lazar stresses, sexism can take endless subtle forms that need to be unveiled. It is particularly important to deconstruct the Nicaraguan climate change discourse as it gives an exceptional visibility to women while it contributes to reinforcing patriarchy,

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[4] This can also be related to the "hard" versus "soft" adaptation paths present in the climate adaptation literature (Sovacool 2011).

thus impeding the construction of a desperately needed feminist response to climate change. In this sense, my endeavor, "the marriage of feminism with CDA (…) [is] a rich and powerful political critique (Lazar 2007, 144) that serves the interests of for gender justice and climate justice.

Feminist CDA of climate change

Published in 2005, *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse* (Lazar 2005a) was the first (and to date, the last) book-length volume explicitly dedicated to feminist discourse analysis. While the chapters draw on a diversity of situations in which sexism and patriarchy are reproduced in discourses (e.g. Barát 2005; Magalhaes 2005; Wodak 2005), none of them are on environmental issues. This can be attributed to the fact that feminism seldom talk to environmentalism and vice-versa (MacGregor 2010). In particular, in Nicaragua, the two 'fields' of climate change and gender are divided. At an event on gender and climate change I attended in February 2014[5], in order to start a discussion between gender and climate change specialists, both were invited. Among the participants, all but one climate change specialist were men, while all gender specialists were women. The gender difference was not the obstacle for the discussion but a manifestation of the epistemological divide between these two fields of 'expertise', reinforced by the fact the climate change is often considered by practitioners as a scientific problem ('hard') while gender is seen as a social ('soft') issue. The former is considered as urgent and in need of technological solutions, the latter as a long-term issue that in the Nicaraguan case has been recently instrumentalized through post-neoliberal politics.

The existing divide within feminist movements in Nicaragua also supports this non-engagement with environmental issues from a feminist perspective. Indeed, they have historically concentrated their efforts in urban contexts and have left the responsibility of rural feminist interventions, including on climate change adaptation, for NGOs. Urban feminists in Nicaragua developed work on sexual and reproductive rights, as well as on gender violence. In the rural areas NGOs and farmers' organizations have concentrated their efforts on gender equality from an economic perspective, implementing work that often lacks feminist perspective. This historical divide is also an obstacle for Nicaraguan feminists to engage in the climate change debate. Feminism in Nicaragua is mainly urban and climate change is constructed as essentially a rural concern. Thus, the Government faces little resistance from feminists concerning its climate change politics and the way it discursively integrates women.

Intersectionality in feminist CDA of climate change

For a feminist CDA of climate change, just as for feminist political ecology (e.g. Ge, Resurreccion, and Elmhirst 2011; Nightingale 2011; Tschakert 2012; Mollett and Faria 2013) the recognition of difference and diversity among women (and men) is a key concern. As Michelle M. Lazar put it:

> Even though women are subordinated to men structurally in the patriarchal gender order, the intersection of gender with other systems of power based on

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[5] The event was organized in Estelí together with the French NGO Agronomes et Vétérinaires sans Frontieres and supported by the UNDP in Nicaragua. It was done in the frame of a small research project I was involved in that culminated in the publication of a document on gender and climate change adaptation in Nicaragua (Gonda 2014).

> race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, culture, and geography means that gender oppression is neither materially experienced nor discursively enacted in the same way for women everywhere (Lazar 2007, 149).

This is the reason why I am not only interested in 'tracking' patriarchy, understood as a particular form of gender relations in which masculine dominance is constantly reinforced (Ford and Gregson 1986, 193) in environmental and climate change politics. Rather, I am interested in understanding how intersectional identities of gender, class, and age, created through environmental and climate change politics produce and sometimes reinforce unequal power relations.

Data and data-collection methods

The main research method used was participant observation and interviewing with rural women and men in two rural communities of Nicaragua: San José de Amucayán, in the municipality of Telpaneca, department of Madriz in the dry region, and la Ceiba, in the municipality of El Rama, in the Autonomous Region of the South Caribbean Coast in the humid region of the country. Activities included participation in people's everyday lives such as water and fuel wood fetching, watering, harvesting, laundry making, participation to assemblies, religious activities and project trainings in the community. It also included informal discussions with rural women and men and project personnel. A total of 78 rural women and men were interviewed about the changes they experienced in their lives[6]. Interviews were also held with 20 climate change and development experts, as well as with 10 feminist activists. I also analyzed available climate change project and policy documents. In particular, I did a textual analysis of the 2003 National Development Plan as well as the 2012 National Human Development Plan and the 2010 National Environmental and Climate Change Strategy.

Post-neoliberal nature as our own mother

The 2012 National Human Development Plan written under the Government ruled by the president Daniel Ortega since 2007 presents a paradigmatic shift in comparison to its neoliberal predecessor, the 2003 National Development Plan. It is currently considered as the main public policy in Nicaragua. The 2012 Plan spells out the development model it envisions in its first chapter called "The Christian, socialist and solidary model of citizen power[7]". Just like the 2003 National Development Plan, the 2012 document starts from the observation that an alternative development model is the only solution to get out of the crisis. However, it frames it as stemming from sixteen years of neoliberal policies and adjustment programs that increased social inequalities. It states that the new development model it envisions is aimed towards:

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[6] In the community, the sampling of the interviewees followed a snowball strategy combined with a strategic sampling with the idea to listen to people from different gender, age groups and characterized by different types of access to means of production with the intention to grasp most of the existent perspectives on climate change. The institutional representatives who were interviewed were chosen as they work for institutions that are or have implemented climate change adaptation projects in the studied community or the neighboring ones. The experts I interviewed were chosen on the basis of their expertise in the field (encountered in the literature or recommended by my key informants).

[7] "El modelo cristiano, socialista y solidario del poder ciudadano".

structural transformations in order to overcome exclusion and unshackle the human development potential of historically excluded groups such as the poor, women, youngsters, indigenous people, afro-descendants, handicapped people, among others[8] (Nicaraguan Government 2012, 8 my translation).

Just as in the 2003 National Development Plan, economic growth is seen as a central motor for the foreseen transformations to occur: "[t]he success criteria is economic growth with employment generation, overcoming poverty and inequality as well as the elimination of hunger[9]"(Nicaraguan Government 2012, 8 my translation). However, the shift is notable in comparison to the neoliberal discourse: while in 2003, economic growth was seen as reachable through the trickle-down effects of the economic development of territories and sectors with potentials, poverty reduction and equality are now seen as factors of development. The strategic goals of the 2012 Plan are formulated in terms of the transformations the Nicaraguan society has to undertake in order to reach the main goal. These transformations are understood as interlinked, and relate to the political, environmental, economic and social levels. Environmental and social issues represent two of the four main transformation goals of the current post-neoliberal Government; they are not as marginalized behind economic goals as they were in the 2003 Plan. Environmental concerns are in addition present within the economic transformation axis, through the family farming model, for example, both socially and environmentally more friendly than the agro-industrial model encouraged by the previous, neoliberal Government. This discursive rupture from the market oriented neoliberal narrative on environmental management towards a gendered human development discourse that defies the conceptual divide between humans and the environment is one of the most important manifestations of the post-neoliberal discourse adopted by the Nicaraguan Government since 2007.

The extraordinary visibility given to women pictured as nurturing mothers is the second most important manifestation of the post-neoliberal discourse in Nicaragua. It is related to the first one, as women and nature are considered as especially connected. This is best illustrated with the current Nicaraguan climate change discourse (Nicaraguan Government 2010), integrated in the 2012 National Human Development Plan . Indeed, climate change is one of the twelve major public policies and strategies the 2012 National Human Development Plan sketches out. The chapter called "Protection of Mother Earth, Climate Change Adaptation and Integral Management of Risks of Disaster" (Nicaraguan Government 2012, 145–164 my translation) is a replicate of the National Environmental and Climate Change Strategy for the 2010-2015 period (Nicaraguan Government 2010). This strategy counts twenty-seven pages and is divided into the following four parts: i) Values and ideals, ii) Environmental situation of Nicaragua, iii) Strategic guidelines and iv) Action Plan. It is dated April 6th, 2010 and was authored by the Nicaraguan Government.

The 'Mother Earth Myth'[10] and numerous references to women are widely present in the document. The strategy describes nature and the earth that is to be "loved, respected, protected as our own mother" (2010, 3 my translation). In total, the word

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[8] transformaciones estructurales para superar la exclusión y liberar el potencial de desarrollo humano de los excluidos históricamente, como los pobres, las mujeres, los jóvenes, los pueblos originarios, los afro descendientes, los discapacitados, entre otros.

[9]"El criterio de éxito es el crecimiento económico con generación de trabajo y superación de la pobreza y la desigualdad, así como la eliminación del hambre".

[10] In reference to an article from Melissa Leach: Earth Mother Myths and Other Ecofeminist Fables: How a Strategic Notion Rose and Fell (2007).

'mother' is mentioned twenty-one times in the twenty-seven page- long document, most often as "Mother Earth" with capital letters. There are also numerous references to "life" in general, such as "respect to life" (2010, 2 my translation), "environmental education for life" (2010, 7 my translation), "the principle that we, human beings, are [...] guardians of life" (2010, 7 my translation), and "water for life" (2010, 9 my translation). In the second part of strategy paper, women are being referred to through the roles they are traditionally attributed in the Nicaraguan society: (environmental) education, water management, fuel wood provision and the use of medicinal plants. In the third part the link between the necessary environmental education and women becomes more evident as it explains that the goal of environmental education is "life" itself, as if women were not only giving birth to children but also environmental consciousness. Also, the pronouns used in both the 2012 National Human Development Plan and the 2010 Climate Change strategy paper are gendered, which was not a common practice in official documents before the post-neoliberal era. For example, the authors write "las y los Nicaragüenses", which can be translated as "Nicaraguan women and men" (2010, 2 my translation). Direct references to women appear several times in the document: for example when the document establishes the relation between the 'salvation' of "Mother Earth" with the "restitution of the rights for a healthy environment for our women, little boys, little girls, young people, men, all women "(2010, 8 my translation) or when it mentions that women should be given priority in environmental education (2010, 19) and in environmental management (2010, 20). The importance of giving protagonism to women also appears explicitly in the third and fourth strategic guidelines, where the document refers to concrete governmental programmes targeted towards low-income rural and urban women in Nicaragua such as the "Hunger Zero" program[11], discussed further. Finally, it is to be noted that despite the fact that there are a lot of feminine references in the discourse of the strategy paper, there is no mention of men's roles. While the strategy paper lists the factors it identifies as the causes of climate change, such as the use of fossil fuels, the chemical contamination of water and industrial pollution (2010, 3–4), it does not establish any relation of these causes with predominantly masculine activities in the Nicaraguan society (transport, intensive agricultural model and in particular cattle-breeding, as well as the industry) or a masculine, top-down approach to climate change.

This construction of earth as a female who feeds humanity as well as of women seen as close to nature relates to ecofeminist views. According to feminist environmentalist Melissa Leach "[e]cofeminism is based on the notion that women are especially 'close to nature' in a spiritual or conceptual sense" (2007, 70). She explains: "[e]cofeminists argue that (connected) women and nature have been subjected to a shared history of oppression by patriarchal institutions and dominant western culture" (2007, 70). Thus, in the current framing of human-environmental relations in Nicaragua, women and the Earth share a common destiny. The sad destiny of the environment is possible to be reversed if women are put to work: because of their special connection to nature, women appear in the policy in the role of 'experts' in 'fixing the climate change problem', something which makes them particularly visible in the discourse. In the following section I illustrate how this discursive inclusion of women in environmental policies manifested in rural communities.

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[11] The "Hunger Zero" programme is intended to subvention rural families in situation of poverty with animals, seeds and technical assistance.

On the ground: omnipresent women and their core activities

Edurne Larracoechea Bohigas, who studied the current Nicaraguan Government's 'Hambre Cero' (Zero Hunger) program that promotes inclusive rural development through directly supporting rural women's access to means of agricultural production, explains that the program works with women who, during the neoliberal era were only encouraged to implement 'secondary' activities through garden production. Under 'Hambre Cero', they (Larracoechea Bohigas 2011, 8). Their benefits included the 'Productive Bonus' (Bono Productivo) through which they received a package that usually included chickens, seeds, plants and a cow in certain cases. The program is directly and exclusively targeted towards women.

Doña Liliana from San José de Amucayán, who is 47 years-old, married and mother of five children from 28 to 15 years-old, among them a 17 year-old handicapped son, received a cow and chickens with the 'Productive Bonus'. She recounts her experience in the following terms:

> Doña Liliana: - This bonus is only for women, it is women, so we women have to go to attend the training, meetings and issues like this because it is for women, including the signature [of the contract], and everything is for women.
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> Me: - And what is your opinion about that? That it is for women only?
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> Doña Liliana: - Ummm, well… I don't know, as they say it benefits women but as (...) the [project] technician said, *well, the women receives [the benefit], but the husband is the one who has to look after it ...*
>
> Me: - He has to look after it?
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> Doña Liliana: -Yes, because the men have to look after the cow. At least [in my case], I only went to receive it [from the project], but my poor son went to bring the cow [to the community], he is the one who looks after it, there, in the pastures[12].

Both Doña Liliana and the project technician she talks about are clear about the fact that at the end of the day it is men who benefit from the project, as they are the ones who are taking care of the cow. It is also important to note that the cow is the most mentioned advantage by the beneficiaries of the project. The fact that the cows rapidly pass under the responsibility of men in San José de Amucayán is also due to the fact that the 'Productive Bonus' is not a gift, but a loan at very favorable rates women have to pay back. At the time of the interview, Doña Liliana still owed some money, but had paid back the major part of her debt, 2700 *Córdobas*[13] with the money of her husband.

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[12] Doña Liliana: - Ese bono sólo es para las mujeres, son las mujeres, por eso las mujeres tenemos que andar en capacitaciones, reunión cuestiones así, porque es a las mujeres, la firma y todo es a las mujeres.
 Yo: Y ¿cómo lo ve eso? ¿qué sólo sea para mujeres?
Doña Liliana: Ummm bueno… este… yo no sé, como dicen ellos es beneficio para las mujeres pero decía (…) el técnico [del proyecto], *bueno la mujer recibe, pero el marido es el que la viera…*
 Yo: -¿es el que la viera?
Doña Liliana: Sí porque una vaca son ellos las que la ven, por lo menos yo sólo la fui a recibir [del proyecto], pero mi pobre hijo la fue a traer [a la comunidad], es el que la cuida ahí en el potrero.
[13] Equivalent to nearly 100 USD in 2014.

While the strategies to take care of the cow and pay back the debt are slightly different from one woman to another I interviewed, they often involve men and what is common is that women give a lot of importance to the cow but they do not talk about it as if it was their own animal. An illustrative example is a situation that happened when I went to fetch firewood with Doña Rosibel, a 48 year-old married woman and her 12 year-old granddaughter. We crossed the family plot where four cows were grazing. I asked about the owners of the animals. Doña Rosibel answered that three of them were of her husband and one was of the 'Productive Bonus'. This illustrates how these women, direct beneficiaries of these projects intended to serve their empowerment, do not feel the benefits as theirs. This is in part due to the fact that cattle-breeding is mainly a male activity in the Nicaraguan social imaginary and in practice having a cow increases social status, especially in the case of men (Flores and Torres 2012).

In the governmental programs of the neoliberal era, women were given additional *secondary* responsibilities in agricultural and environmental management. Programs in the post-neoliberal era provide them with additional responsibilities constructed as *core*. However, it is too difficult for women to assume these roles due the current division of gender roles, their lack of empowerment as well as the importance of symbolic masculinities at play for example in cattle-breeding. Rather, the risk with this type of programs is that women are utilized by men to access benefits and that the reasons for unequal gender relations are not addressed. A feminist activist who is a harsh critic of the existing division of feminist movements in Nicaragua that impede a coherent opposition to the measures of the Government she qualifies as "pseudo-feminist", explains that 'Hambre Cero' is illustrative of the governmental approach to gender: "women matter a lot to this Government but [the Government] has much care not to disrupt the power relations between men and women[14].

 Another negative effect of this type of measures is how the integration of women as promoters of social capital is seen as a fix for poverty (Molyneux 2002). This can be illustrated by one of the successful measures of the post-neoliberal Government: that of increasing school enrolment rates for children. The Government is sending food (usually rice and beans) to public schools so it can be prepared for enrolled children. This encourages poor families to send their offspring to school. The measure supports the family as it saves as many meals per day as many children they have enrolled. It also helps to fight undernutrition among children and provides them better conditions to study. However, even though the Government provides the basic provisions for the meal, the mothers of the students are in most cases in charge of cooking the raw products. In the two rural communities where I did my research, mothers, in groups of two or three, take rolls to cook for the children at school. Of course, this measure is only implemented in public schools, the ones that are subsidized by the Government. Hence, poor women from rural communities, and poor urban women like the cleaning ladies working in NGOs who have their children in public institutions carry this burden. This is an illustration of how the unpaid labor of mostly poor women is mobilized to subsidize social policies.

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[14] "A este Gobierno si les importa mucho las mujeres pero cuidando mucho de no trastocar las relaciones de poder entre hombres y mujeres".

With the argument of women being the most apt to fight climate change for the simple reason that they are women, climate change adaptation becomes part of their reproductive roles. In the same way women are bearing the responsibility of cooking for food at school for the children for the simple reason they are mothers and thus subsidize the governmental (otherwise good) social policy, they are called to subsidize climate change adaptation. The reinforcement of existing 'traditional' gender roles constructed as natural is one of the manifestations of patriarchy in the field of climate change. In the following section, I discuss how the fact that the responsibility of the promotion of gender equality passed from NGOs in the neoliberal era to the State in the post-neoliberal regime contributes to translating private patriarchy to the public sphere.

The post-neoliberal era: the paternalistic State substituting NGOs

The post-neoliberal government's efforts to integrate formerly excluded women to the productive and environmental sphere and making them the primary beneficiaries of social, agricultural and environmental programs, create gratefulness from these women. A feminist activist from Matagalpa explains that rural women who benefitted from a cow or other means of production through the 'Hambre Cero' program share that "nobody in the community dares to be liberal anymore". With "liberal", she refers to the Liberal Political Parties in opposition to the ruling Sandinista Government, which is at the origin of the 'Hambre Cero' program. Referring to the program which gives women the direct responsibility of the distributed means of production, the feminist leader from Matagalpa further states:

> But women's work has not changed, worse; they work more hours and [they have] more and more responsibilities. So the program has some positive impact on their wellbeing but without being something of good quality that would provoke [their] empowerment. Above all, (…) [women's empowement] is very limited by the context in which the program is being implemented and because of the politicization and clientelism with which it is being managed. Therefore, everything that is positive [in the program] for women (…) occurs in the frame of gratefulness, of [the idea that] *'the Government gave me something and I am grateful for it. For the first time they care for us, women'*[15] (Interview with a feminist activist from Matagalpa, October 2014).

The paternalistic approach to women is different from the paternalistic approach to men in environmental politics, because it intervenes in the Nicaraguan patriarchal society in which women, especially the ones who are poor, indigenous or oppressed in other ways are already facing increased marginalization. Subordination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and class is the vehicle through which private patriarchy is transposed to the public sphere. A feminist activist I interviewed makes an illustrative parallel between the patriarchal order within the family, the Government and the post-colonial Nicaraguan society:

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[15] Entonces pero el trabajo de ellas no ha cambiado, incluso se ha sumado más horas de trabajo y [tienen] más y más responsabilidad. Entonces [el programa] tiene cierto impacto positivo en su bienestar, cierto aspecto positivo pero sin que sea una cosa como de calidad, en lo que supondría [su] empoderamiento. Sobre todo esa parte está muy limitada por el contexto en el que se da el programa y por la politización y por el clientelismo con el que se maneja. Entonces, todo lo que en un lado puede tener de positivo para ellas (…) está en ese marco de agradecimiento de que *'el gobierno me ha dado, de que le estoy agradecida, de que por primera vez se, se preocupan de nosotras'*.

> [This is a culture] of gratitude towards the one who gives. It is an inherited culture of excessive personalization of leadership ("*caudillismo*"), very post-colonial. The boss is good, because he cares about me, he gives things to my children, he takes care of me on the farm, he is preoccupied with giving me a bed in better state, a small house to live in. There is no questioning of the relationship of exploitation.[16]

In the rural family, men generally are the owners of land and other means of production. As reflected in my interviews with rural women, while the man is 'good' and provides for his wife and children, women usually do not ask for more, even if they know that if he leaves them for another woman, they might be left with nothing. The same happens at the level of the *hacienda.* In my two research communities, *haciendas* are large cattle breeding farms where poor, often indigenous landless peasants or peasants with very small plots work for barely nothing taking care of the land and animals of the large cattle-breeder. In exchange, they receive the right to live there and produce just enough crops for themselves so that they survive. The owners of the *haciendas* are large non-indigenous cattle-breeders who live in neighboring big cities or the capital. They are considered 'good' if they provide the small plot for the smallholder to plant basic crops and if they are ready to lend money in case of an emergency of the smallholder. This is the case even if the smallholders know that they will never be able to get out of poverty with the pay they are getting, and that the activities on the *hacienda* are often destroying the last forested patches and contaminating the last rivers of the communities they live in. At the governmental level, it is the same system of subordination that is put at work: the government provides women with 50% of the positions, and with pigs and plants, which makes the government 'good' for women even when in reality it instrumentalizes them.

Thus, by bearing the responsibility of the promotion of gender equality, the post-neoliberal State reproduces masculine and class domination in environmental management through paternalism. The neoliberal State did not care about the inclusion of women in environmental management thus letting the patriarchal order contribute to marginalizing them at the family and community levels. The post-neoliberal States discursively includes women in environmental and climate change politics thus transposing this patriarchal order to the public sphere. In the following section, I discuss the main challenges for a feminist response to climate change to emerge in contemporary Nicaragua.

Possibilities for a feminist response to climate change in post-neoliberal Nicaragua

Risks of the post-feminist discourse

Usually, post-feminist discourse is understood through the 'achievements' that would render feminism useless (Lazar 2007). The type of achievements it integrates is often measured through equality indicators, such as the ones mentioned in the Introduction. Michelle M. Lazar warns about the dangers of the post-feminist discourse:

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[16][Es una cultura] de agradecimiento de el que da. Es una cultura muy guardado, muy caudillista, muy post-colonial. El patrón es bueno, porque me cuida, me da a mi, me da a mis hijos, me cuida en la finca y tener unas literas en mejor estado, una casita. No hay cuestionamiento de la relación de explotación.

> The discourse of popular postfeminism requires urgent need of critique, for it lulls one into thinking that struggles over the social transformation of the gender order have become defunct. The discourse is partly a reactionary masculinist backlash against the whittling away of the patriarchal dividend" (Lazar 2007, 154).

Such critique is urgent in the Nicaraguan society. As feminist scholar Karen Kampwirth puts it clearly: "the return to the left in Nicaragua does not look very left-wing, at least not from a feminist perspective" (2008, 132). Indeed, in parallel with the visibilization of women, in Nicaragua, feminist movements and organizations have been harassed by all means, and 'pseudo-feminist' measures have been implemented in order to cut feminist claims. As Tim Rogers, a journalist from *The Times* explains:

> [President] Ortega has used all his tentacles — Sandinista media outlets, government ministries and fanatical party structures — to investigate, slander and harass Nicaragua's feminist movement, which [has been] informally accused of everything from money laundering and conspiring with the CIA, to "illegally" promoting abortion, pornography and "assassinating children".
>
> [Ortega's wife,] Murillo has even tried to reinvent the feminist movement […] but her views will hardly be deemed transformative — she lauds the traditional role of a woman as wife and mother, and rails against other feminists as "counterrevolutionaries" who "dress in the clothing of women, but have never known the sensibility of a woman's heart."(Rogers 2008)

By institutionalizing the (pseudo-)feminist discourse and taking it to the climate change policy level, the impression that the Government wants to give is that the structural conditions are created for both climate change adaptation and gender equality to be reached. In the field of climate change in particular, women are called to participate both in decision-making and in actions on climate change adaptation because they are pictured as the ones who have the best understanding of what should be done. This relates to a typically problematic assumption of postfeminist discourse: that women, because they are given the possibilities to participate, only need to try hard enough (Lazar 2007, 154) to achieve in this case, both climate change adaptation and gender equality. This assumption that they can fully exercise their personal freedom results in the fact that it "obscures the social and material constraints faced by different groups of women" (Lazar 2007, 154) in the face of climate change. This discourse is one of the reasons why for feminism in Nicaragua, the panorama is dark. One of the feminist activists I interviewed compares Nicaraguan gender politics to psychological abuse, something that is more difficult to detect and fight than physical violence. Referring to the Government's gender politics, she says:

> It is how one can totally decaffeinate feminism. They extract all its essence. This is perverse because it implies a capacity for critical analysis much more profound to detect it. It is like psychological violence or abuse. When it is physical, you are beaten and it is clear. But when it is psychological abuse, it is a lot subtler. You can spend years and you don't realize because you always have your self-esteem to the ground. I feel that it is similar, that there is institutionalized violence, manipulation, it is like touching women inappropriately, it is subordination[17] (Interview with a feminist activist in Nicaragua, December 2014).

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[17] Es cómo podemos descafeinar totalmente el feminismo. Le quitan toda la esencia. Eso es

The masculinist backlash is extraordinarily threatening for feminist purposes in the field of climate change as climate change is already a masculinist sphere, prone to maintain a postfeminist discourse in post-neoliberal Nicaragua.

Finally, the postfeminist discourse and practice are detrimental to both women and men. As largely discussed in this chapter, governmental efforts to promote gender equality in rural Nicaragua under the threats of climate change are given meanings that are not feminist. Concerning men, not only the powerful cattle-breeders who are most often at the origin of environmental degradation become discursively invisible, the needs of smallholder male farmers are also excluded on the basis of gender. This is best illustrated with the case of Don Leandro from San José de Amucayán, a 56 year-old widow who is raising alone his three grandsons, the oldest being 14 years-old. Don Leandro lost his wife twelve years ago. Even before he became a widow, since the early 2000s, his daughter used to work in the city of Estelí. She has been away from the community for fifteen years, leaving the education of her sons first to her mother, and afterwards to her father. Don Leandro who looks much older than his age is very poor. He survives from working on his two-hectare plot, with the financial help from his daughter and by selling his workforce on neighboring farms. He also looks after his grandsons: he cooks for them and is responsible for their health and education. Don Leandro, despite his important needs cannot be part of governmental programs for the simple reason he is not a woman. He is being excluded from the governmental discourse because of his gender. This illustrates how empowerment of women, in the way it is conceived by the governmental discourse, results in the disempowerment of a poor, old, widow man. This is not the kind of transformation of gender relations envisaged by feminists. It is not the way climate change practitioners plan to address gendered vulnerabilities either.

Risks and opportunities of the ecofeminist discourse

With the ecofeminist discourse, climate change adaptation becomes discursively part of the reproductive roles of women. In addition to fetching wood, water, cooking, taking care of the children and the elderly, they become in charge of implementing climate change adaptation. Under the label of climate change adaptation, women are typically encouraged to contribute to diversifying the production systems, implementing agro-forestry, using cooking stoves that economize fuel wood, harvesting rainwater, and using plants as natural medicine, among other activities. If social reproduction, now including climate change adaptation, is seen as something that falls 'naturally' under the expertise and responsibility of women, then questioning the gendered division of responsibilities between the productive and reproductive spheres would imply questioning the current patriarchal societal order, something that is not part of the Nicaraguan political and social agenda. Naturalizing climate change adaptation in such a way impedes the possibility for unequal gender relations to become a key concern in the field of climate change.

This situation is rendered even more complex when the gendered climate change discourse of post-neoliberal Nicaragua intersects with the mainstream climate

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perverso porque implica una capacidad de análisis crítica mucho más profundo para detectarlo. Es como la violencia o el abuso sicológico. Cuando es físico, te pegan y esta claro. Pero cuando es abuso sicológico, es mucho más sutil. Podés pasar años y no te das cuenta porque siempre estás con la autoestima al piso. Yo siento que es parecido, que hay una violencia institucionalizada, de manipulación, de manoseo, de subordinación.

change discourse. According to feminist scholar Sherylin MacGregor, the technical perspective in the mainstream climate change discourse is masculine as the framing of the problem is tied to environmental modernization and environmental security fields which require, among other things, "technical, diplomatic, and military solutions, [which are] entirely consistent with hegemonic (hyper)masculinity" (MacGregor 2010, 231). In Nicaragua, despite the gendered discourse present in the National Environmental and Climate Change strategy (Nicaraguan Government 2010), in practice, the policy translates into measures that promote climate change adaptation in the foreign currency generating sectors such as coffee production and cattle-breeding. This illustrates how existing class related power relations influenced the translation of the post-neoliberal climate change discourse to sectorial strategies that favour the wealthiest minority of the population. Gendered policies were thus not translated into gendered sectorial strategies. Women are discursively put to the front, but they are compelled to bear increased responsibilities in a field which is dominantly top-down and masculine and which is not interested in tackling gendered climate injustices. Also, women are often expected to execute climate change adaptation strategies on a voluntarily basis: they are called to mothering earth just as they do with their children. The funding available for implementing cooking and rainwater harvesting technologies is insignificant in comparison to the one targeted towards the conversion of coffee production to cocoa.

The essentializing aspect of ecofeminism is particularly visible in the Nicaraguan climate change discourse. However, according to post-structural ecofeminist Noël Sturgeon, while it is important to acknowledge ecofeminism's problematic aspects, it should not be systematically associated with "a form of racist and sexist essentialism" (1997, 255), in which rural women of the developing world are pictured through their nurturing roles towards the environment. Instead, she argues that there are cases in which ecofeminism is useful. For instance, Noël Sturgeon explains that the integration of ecofeminist views in development policies was a result of feminist activism in the 1970s: before, women were mostly invisible for development strategists (1997, 266). Hence, the main achievement of ecofeminism in politics has been to raise the attention to the fact that if development was to be achieved, attention was to be accorded to women. This is extremely important to signal in the Nicaraguan situation, as it constitutes a first step on which feminists working on climate change need to build on.

In order to do so and start the construction of a feminist response to climate change, it is important to understand why essentialism is used in the discourse, by whom and with which objectives. The Nicaraguan climate change strategy with its essentialist and ecofeminist features seems to be in line with the governmental stratagem to annihilate the Nicaraguan feminist opposition: the effect of giving so much importance to women in the discourse contributes to cutting all opportunities for feminist claims. Indeed, the ecofeminist discourse, by putting to the fore the ideological link between women and the environment, entails a problematic definition of gender that does not allow for social transformation.
Attention to ideology and discourse can be particularly useful to deconstruct environmental 'problems' (discursively framed as such) like climate change, as well as to analyse their feminist character in order to understand why some coping solutions are put forward instead of others. To paraphrase Marteen Hajer: climate change in Nicaragua as such is not a social construct: the point is how international

institutions, governments, nongovernmental organizations and farmers in Nicaragua make sense of it, giving specific identities, subjectivities and roles to Nicaraguan rural women. "In this respect, there are many possible realities" (Hajer 1993, 44; in Fletcher 2009, 804)[18] with which both feminists and environmentalists need to engage in order to open the possibility for a collective construction of a feminist solution to climate change.

Conclusion

In this paper, I analyzed from a feminist discourse analytical perspective Nicaraguan environmental and climate change politics in order to illustrate some of the ways in which environmental politics in general and climate change politics in particular, intersect with gender politics and contribute to reproducing particular systems of oppression. My intention was to highlight the discursive shifts and continuities at the intersection of environmental and gender politics brought by the post-neoliberal era in comparison to the previous, neoliberal epoch.

I showed how the discursive shift from an environment seen as manageable towards nature constructed as 'our own Mother' contributed to give women a primary place in environmental and climate change discourses. While this paradigmatic change has opened the floor to better include in the discourse multi-dimensional (gendered) inequalities in the face of climate change, the possibility has not been used for feminist purposes. Post-neoliberal environmental politics essentialize and instrumentalize women by implementing policies that highlight women's 'natural connectedness to nature' and by reinforcing existing 'traditional' gender roles. Climate change adaptation becomes part of the reproductive roles of women and private patriarchy is transposed to the public sphere, thus making it difficult for an already divided and weakened Nicaraguan feminist movement to engage with climate change from a feminist perspective. On top of all these aspects related to gender, climate change politics reinforce other systems of oppression linked to class, age and ethnicity, partially inherited from colonial times. I argue that in order to contribute with policy relevant elements for a feminist response to global climate change, the type of task undertaken in this chapter is a first step as deconstructing the post-feminist and ecofeminist character of the current Nicaraguan climate change discourse reveals the way it reproduces gendered oppressions.

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[18] The original quote is: "large groups of dead trees as such are not a social construct; the point is how one makes sense of dead trees. In this respect there are many possible realities" (Hajer 1993, 44; in Fletcher 2009, 804).

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