

## **Reflection on Reading 2: What is Gender and Why a Gendered Perspective?**

Growing up, I used to think sex and gender meant the same thing - a simple way of differentiating people's identities to be either male or female. Through these readings, I have learned that sex and gender have distinct meanings: sex is an ideal construct that is forcibly materialized through time, whereas gender is a social attribute assigned to individuals by society (Butler, 1993). Butler and MacGregor concurred that both sex and gender are the result of social construction, meaning that they are not inherent. They also believe that there is a strong connection between gender and its environment and that it is all governed by the power dynamics in play (patriarchal systems), in which misogyny is manifested strongly (Butler, 1993). According to Butler, sex is to gender as feminism is to masculinity.

On the other hand, MacGregor (2017) identifies that in communities that are predominantly identified as cisgender, there is a lot of predominant masculinity as opposed to feminists (theorized as hegemonic) (MacGregor, 2017). Hence, paving the way for the effects of climate change to prevail over time, despite the abundance of nature's atmosphere and resources, cultural practices are allowed to act on nature, which leads to the materialization of nature (Butler, 1993).

MacGregor (2017) clearly explains how different gendered perspectives shape our experiences as humans and how our environment is seen through a gender lens. MacGregor argued that women were closer to nature in the 1990s in the Global North due to their subordination to men and the environmental crisis, which informed their moral duty to save it; hence, the birth of ecofeminism. The idea of gender is used by ecofeminist theorists to examine how people interact with nature (MacGregor, 2017). Matthew (2017) then examined the ecofeminist concept of

dualism to critique MacGregor's view of ecofeminism. The power exhibited over nature through the medium of science enables the west to colonize other societies, thereby producing a space in which male dominance exists in some societies (Matthew, 2017). This results in the emergence of gendered categories and acts as a catalyst for dominance over feminists (Matthews, 2017). A clear example of dualism is humans versus nature, where humans feel like the subjects and nature is the object.

In lieu of the criticism above by Matthew and the agreement by Butler and MacGregor, MacGregor believes that four (4) approaches should be employed to analyze the concepts of gender and environment: First, research on the discovery that there is a complicated relationship between feminists' environment and other axes of social differences that shape people's lives, such as race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Butler, 1993, MacGregor, 2017), The second approach is political discourse within the academic forum, which heavily relies on climate change, thereby raising the bar for the United Nations to prioritize gender equality and climate action as part of the 17 key areas of focus for sustainable development objectives. The gender-environment connection in politics, policy, and practice is the third approach that seeks to discuss how women tend to be on the front lines in times of crisis and the significance of gender analysis in policymaking. This approach aligns well with Alison and Miguel's (2020) article on why feminism is beneficial for your health and the illustration from the paper, which describes explicitly how countries led by women curbed the pandemic better. The fourth approach elaborates on the visionary nature of feminist research, which leads to political movements and social change because gender and environment shape people's lives differently, as argued by MacGregor (2017). It assumes that gendered roles and life patterns adapt to the context in which individuals live (MacGregor, 2017).

The global pandemic (COVID-19) has provided clear grounds to reasonably argue why feminism is good not only for health but for the environment as well. Alison and Miguel (2020) argued that countries headed by women were able to manage pandemics more efficiently than those in patriarchal systems. I agree with Alison and Miguel's perspective that in all spheres of politics, economics, and society, women's leadership emerges from and strengthens equality. A feminist is resilient in challenging circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Alison & Miguel, 2020). I have seen women in Northeast Nigeria building resilience in internally displaced camps due to insecurity despite disease outbreaks and very harsh living conditions, yet they strive to live life and protect their families and their environment even though the conditions are not conducive. It is true that "feminism could save our lives" (Alison & Miguel, 2020).

In a nutshell, history has recorded that gender and sexualities are different contextually, and their differences are their identities, and that is what shapes their lives. There are, however, a lot of similarities that exist globally, though they are more prevalent in the global south than the global north, which has adjusted to accommodate the LGBT+ since the 1990s (MacGregor, 2017). The perspective of gender in environment, health, and development even today has fueled the development of the sustainable development goals by the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP), where gender equality and climate action form part of the 17 core goals to be achieved by 2030. Inasmuch as these cultural differences exist and directly affect our environment, looking at the governing systems and individual lives from a gendered perspective (inclusion) will bring about development rather than wasting resources and energy on power tussles and predominance.

## REFERENCES

- Alison , B., & Miguel , F. (2020, 08 26). Why Feminism is Good for Your Health. Washington DC, Washington DC, United States Of America. Retrieved 09 02, 2023, from <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/author/abrysk/>
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. London: Routledge. Retrieved 09 02, 2023
- MacGregor, S. (2017). *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*. New york: Routledge. Retrieved 09 02, 2023
- Matthews, F. (2017). The Dilemma of Dualism. In S. MacGregor, *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment* (pp. 54-67). New York: Routledge.