



REVISTA

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Tejiendo redes entre género, interculturalidad y biodiversidad

An infallible relationship among gender, interculturality and biodiversity

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Resumen

Este artículo invita, a mirar al género y la interculturalidad en la complejidad de sus interacciones que ocurren en unos contextos eco ambiental en el que las relaciones de poder de unos colectivos sobre otros -de hombres sobre mujeres o blancos sobre indígenas y afrodescendientes- con la biodiversidad implican, a su vez, interrelaciones con graves consecuencias en términos de equidad. El género y la interculturalidad tienen un desarrollo conceptual de mucha data; no obstante, su evolución, más bien, ha sido en paralelo con poca articulación entre los dos, con abordajes fragmentados y parciales. Las personas por su género y la pertenencia a una etnia han sido objeto de discriminación, inequidad y exclusión y muchas veces separadas de sus medios de vida. En tal sentido, el propósito de este estudio es abrir un espacio de diálogo y encuentro desde un enfoque interdisciplinar en aras de entender cómo se entrecruzan, se dinamizan y se potencian en el uso, acceso y participación de los beneficios de la biodiversidad las poblaciones que habitan estos territorios. La generación de estos nuevos puentes pone el acento en una ecología de saberes, en la que el estado, la academia y las comunidades locales le apuesten a un manejo sustentable de la biodiversidad. La metodología es de carácter cualitativa, por cuanto se hace la confrontación permanente, en un proceso de diálogo intercultural que busca un cambio que armonice la convivencia entre los grupos comunitarios y la naturaleza.

Palabras clave

Biodiversidad, diálogo de saberes, discriminación, equidad, género, interculturalidad, sustentabilidad.



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Abstract

This article looks at gender and interculturality in the complexity of their interactions that occur in the eco-environmental contexts in the power relations of some groups over others (e.g. men over women or whites over indigenous and afro-descendants) with biodiversity, implying interrelations with severe consequences in terms of equity. Therefore, gender and interculturality have a long-standing conceptual development; nevertheless, its evolution has been rather in parallel with little articulation between them, with fragmented and partial approaches. People have been discriminated by their gender and according to their ethnic group, they have also suffered inequity, exclusion, and they have been often separated from their livelihoods. In this regard, the purpose of this study is to create a space for dialogue and discussion from an interdisciplinary approach in order to understand how the populations that live in these territories interact, dynamize and improve in the use, access and participation of the benefits of biodiversity. Additionally, the construction of these new links creates the accent on ecology of knowledge, in which, the state, the academy and local communities bet on a sustainable management of biodiversity. The methodology used in this research is qualitative because of a permanent confrontation in a intercultural dialogue process that seeks a change that harmonizes the coexistence between community groups and environment.

Keywords

Biodiversity, dialogue of knowledge, discrimination, equity, gender, interculturality, sustainability.

1. Introduction

More than fifty percent of the world's population lives, feels and thinks as a woman (FAO, 2011, p. 2)

Environmental problems, among them, those of biodiversity affect people differently, therefore, their approach is interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, and from a gender and intercultural perspective, since, the consequences of the loss of biodiversity are shocking for both men and women and for the flora, fauna and the environment. A strategy for the conservation and restoration of biodiversity at the local, national and global levels can guarantee the individual collective rights of people, nationalities and nature, which means “new ways of doing, thinking and feeling social life and nature, consistent with the position of the human being as an ethical subject that demands emancipation, dignity, freedom and participation” (Jara, 2013, p. 13), much needed for the good living.

The need to know the specific realities of people and nationalities is fundamental in this process of relationship between gender, culture and environment, in which the differences are understood, showing how these differences mark inequalities, exclusions and discrimination in the use, management, control and benefits of biodiversity and environment services.



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Thus, in Latin America, according to FAO (2011) 53 million people suffer hunger and poverty as the sign of inequality; the processes of abandonment of the earth grow as a livelihood of food production and increase food dependence in a geometric way; despite the fact that “women are the main producers, those who learned to preserve seeds and knowledge about the transformation and development of agriculture” (Lovera, 2010, p. 2); women of different nationalities with their knowledge and practices in the use of the biodiversity are the one who most conserve and use them appropriately (Paulson, 2007).

Understanding this sociocultural and ecological context opens the possibility of a necessary linkage between the academy and the local communities, so that from the praxiology of the education it connects with the reality built in concrete facts of interrelation of local communities and biodiversity.

This document begins with the theoretical foundation of the concepts of gender and interculturality in order to have a clear understanding of their constituent elements and their analysis categories; then, it continues with a description of the state of the art of these topics, in which the emphasis is placed on Ecuador; it ends with conclusions in which the link between the theory and the social praxis are established, information that appears as an effort of practical hermeneutic of investigation action of the social, cultural, economic and ecological reality

2. Gender and interculturality in biodiversity

From an analysis of gender and interculturality in biodiverse contexts it is recognized the existence of dialectical relations that are established between different cultures that share imaginary ideological and material realities, making necessary to ask how and why they work in that way and what implications they have for the environmental management and social systems (Rodríguez and Iturmendi, 2013); meanwhile, there is much to learn from ancient cultures that have persisted for centuries through worldviews and practices that guarantee the access of all women and all men, and that promote the sustainability of resources in equality and justice.

2.1. Gender relations mark power relations

People engaged in social sciences and development specialists use two different terms to refer to biological differences and those socially constructed, these are sex and gender. Although both relate to the differences between women and men, notions of gender and sex have different connotations. Sex refers to the biological characteristics that, among others, are common to all societies and cultures. Gender, is related to the traits shaped throughout history of social relations (GIZ, 2013).

Benería (1987), defines gender as:

The set of beliefs, personal traits, attitudes, feelings, values, behaviors, activities that differentiate men and women through a social construction process that has several characteristics. First, it is a historical process that develops at different levels such as the state, the labor market, the schools, the media, the law, the family and through interpersonal relations. Secondly, this process implies the hierarchy of these traits and activities in such a way that the ones that are defined as masculine are attributed more value. (p. 46).



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Throughout history, these social structures have been assigned by the sexual division of labor, roles and different responsibilities from women and men to their lives, families and the community, making each gender to have different knowledge, control and access to natural resources, as well as different opportunities to participate in decision-making about their use and benefits of the goods and services that biodiversity provides.

This reality marks different forms of gender relations, “which are based on the way in which a culture and a particular society understand what it means to be a man or a woman” (Sasvari, Aguilar, Castañeda and Salazar, 2010, p. 41). These relationships permeate all the dimensions of everyday life and are marked by power relations. In this sense, the idea is to achieve empowerment, especially for women, since they have been the ones who have mostly suffered exclusion, discrimination and inequality.

The empowerment of women is known as the process by which people acquire power and control over their own lives, which includes, awareness, development of self-esteem and better opportunities and options (Sasvari, Aguilar, Castañeda and Salazar, 2010). In other words, empowerment is the process through which power, space and above all the word are gained; therefore, women's empowerment does not imply an exercise of domination or an abuse of power, but a capacity for affirming, of being able to act and to promote each and every one of the qualities, not only individual, but also collective of women to affirm the self-confidence, capacity and autonomy to manage and handle their own lives.

Autonomy is thought as an emancipatory strategy that allows to change the power relations and to bet on the equity in the recognition of the plurality and the diversity through an agency, that would allow women to develop in the spaces and dimensions in which they act, create, appropriate and manage a life of opportunities, in fairness and equality.

2.2. Women and their relationship with biodiversity

The predominant orientation of the gender approach in the environmental field favors the instrumentalization of women in terms of sustainable development rather than their empowerment. The approach is being used as a technology, while the gender discourse that questions the validity of hierarchical power relations between men and women has been diluted (Cuvi, 2011, p. 13). This is reaffirmed in the analysis of the last years in relation to gender and environment that are characterized by their little scientific production, their disarticulation between the production of knowledge and their “lack of filters” to evaluate and criticize them.

It is necessary to recognize the work of women, who are discoverers of agriculture, the value of their contributions in the original medicine, the secrets of the Earth and the preservation methods. The unequal distribution of power and management of land ownership is historically favorable to men. The management and production are based on gender inequalities, over the time, women have lived their relationship with the Earth, as a “help” task and not as a meaningful contribution, which is to feed the others (UNESCO, 2009).

The links between women's lives, their roles and relationships of women and men are explored as well as the gender systems at the cultural, legal, political, economic and historical phenomena. This methodological step involves growing interdisciplinarity. In this



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regard, Paulson (2007) states that the categories and instruments of sociology were readily adapted to the study of the roles and identities of women and men; however, working with gender systems requires adding political, agricultural, philosophical, legal, educational, anthropological and more considerations that account for the complexity of their interrelationships.

The importance is to recognize the need to understand the relationships between human groups and natural systems in order to make those relationships more balanced and more sustainable. This is the reason *avant-garde* research and projects are being done with analytical perspective, in order to connect ethnographic, ecological and agricultural local research with institutional and historical studies and political and economic analyses. The idea is to look for results that not only provide a systematic understanding of the relationships between men and women and the use of resources, but also serve to generate conservation and development projects, as well as influencing on national policies and international influences on the flow of resources, capital, people, technologies, ideas and ideologies (Paulson, 2007).

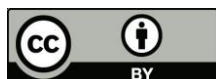
From this analysis, Paulson (2007) says that it is necessary to specify the use of language in the context of a theoretical conceptual argument. Therefore, it suggests making a dialectical leap to:

Instead of preserving nature,
strengthen the ecosystem's generating capacities.
Instead of protecting the woman,
empower women's transformative actions.
Instead of preserving culture,
revitalize cultural creativity.
instead of documenting social realities,
conduct research to help transform realities (p. 8).

Gender and environmental issues in the region is found in the literature generated in Europe and the United States, which have contributed to the construction in this field of knowledge from various disciplines (psychology, anthropology, geography, economics) and from culturally different realities. Many of these texts propose relevant conceptual and methodological proposals that help to understand the multiple and complex interactions that occur between the social and the environmental aspects, and formulate research questions that allow progress in understanding the social and cultural dimensions of environmental change to envision actions aimed at more equitable and fair societies (Vázquez García and Velázquez Gutiérrez, 2004, p. 12).

A good example of this is the book "Looks to the future. Towards the construction of sustainable societies with gender equity" (Faúndez and Weinstein, 2012), which constitutes a compulsory reference point for teachers, students, researchers and investigators interested in the issues of gender and environment.

In Ecuador there are few professionals from non-governmental organizations, environmental NGOs and/or technical teams that are using the gender approach marginally. They use this approach primarily to enhance the work of rural women in the conservation of natural resources in the projects they carry out, and to a lesser extent for these women to know their rights and collectively organize against their subordination. Thus, the



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predominant orientation of the gender approach in the environmental field favors the instrumentalization of women in terms of sustainable development rather than their empowerment to exercise their rights. The approach is being used as one more technology, while the gender discourse that questions the validity of hierarchical power relationships between men and women has been diluted (Paulson, 2007, Cuví and Poats, 2012).

In the research carried out by Varea (2006) on “The powers of Yachacs and Kichwas midwives in the Ecuadorian Amazon”, the unequal gender relations between the Yachacs (men) and the midwives (women) are exposed, relations that mark power, status and recognition. The author, in her study, says that it is distinguished between the daily use of plants such as cassava and the ceremonial use of plants such as ayahuasca, which are performed by women and men of the community, respectively.

Women and men had a subjective relationship with the environment. The midwives of that community (Puyo Pungo) assisted daily illnesses, while the yachacs cured the magical and imagined diseases. While the midwives work in everyday spaces, the Yachacs practice their work in ceremonial spaces. So they have acquired less symbolic meaning than they have throughout their lives. They have preserved their knowledge by controlling the body of the women of the community, through inheritance and their power relationship with other women. Yachacs and midwives do not maintain complementarity relationships on a level of equality, because their knowledge is more valued than theirs (Varea, 2006, p. 89).

In this research in the Amazon with the Kichwa population, it is evident the sexual division of the work and the roles that the genders assume in the reproduction and production of the daily life that responds to patriarchal conceptions, where the image of the man acquires superiority compared to that of women.

Despite the fact that female midwives retain their knowledge through transmissions from one to the other, they cure less valued diseases related to the reproductive environment of communities, from every day and private spaces. “They are excluded from the ceremonial world, but are responsible for the care of childbirth, pregnancy, sexual and reproductive women health and children diseases” (Varea, 2006, p. 102).

2.3. Interculturality and ecology of knowledge

Social exclusion is a process that leads to deprivation for the exercise of capacities (Sen, 2000). So being excluded can be a deprivation. In other words, the perspective of social exclusion represents a multidimensional and processual model for understanding the various factors that contribute to the generation of poverty and social inequality. It identifies with a group, an ethnicity, a gender, the condition of human mobility, being in a certain age group can be considered as visible factors of rapid recognition for exclusion based on stereotypes and imagination.

The conceptions and worldviews present in almost all ancestral people establish intimate associations between “land, territory and nature”. The notion of the nature and universe of indigenous people refers to a cultural and spiritual sense of belonging and identity, where it is obvious to appeal to the right of a healthy and balanced environment. The systemic gaze, the integrated approach, the intimate relationship of the human being with the nature that ancestral people have contrast with the utilitarian perspective, the separation of things,



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dualism, the difficulty of integrating people, who characterize the Western view (CODAE, CODENPE and CODEPMOC, 2013, p. 16).

The systems of life and the self-determination of nationalities and people in the framework of plurinationality is a possibility to strengthen their sustainable and inclusive practices and forms of production, which enable the reconstruction of alternatives socio-natural worlds to the modernization that excludes and contaminates; productive economic systems that obey particular non-cumulative logics, fundamentally endogenous, understood as a growing territorial capacity to preserve ecosystems and generate good living. "Self-determination leads to self-management, expressed in the faculty of people to empower and manage their own affairs; i.e., develop capacities that allow to govern and administer themselves freely in their statute" (CODAE, CODENPE and CODEPMOC, 2013, p.16).

In Ecuador, the word intercultural emerged at the beginning of the constitution of 2008 (Art. 1). Ecuador is defined as a "constitutional state of Rights,..., intercultural, plurinational and Secular"), as well as in some laws, public policies and plans, for example, the Organic Law on citizen participation, national Plan of good living 2013-2017. Cuví and Poats (2011), declare that:

Interculturality promotes the horizontal dialogue between cultures, a respectful relationship without hierarchies. This implies inhibiting our criteria and critiques, our biases and concentrating on understanding other cultural practices that are different from ours. It is a matter of absorbing the ethnocentrism, that is, the tendency to interpret other cultures from the principles of the culture of the one who interprets. Thus, the key words of the intercultural concept are: respect for diversity, interaction, dialogue, horizontality. This concept is generally built in relation to and opposition to multiculturalism (p. 9).

Interculturality is a continuous discovery, a perpetual marvel, the recognition that the other is not a void to fill but a fullness to discover. There can be no intercultural competence without cultural competence that allows recognizing from where we speak, our biases, what makes our viewpoint different from the viewpoint of the other. The intercultural encounter has much to do with the overcoming of their own resistances, recognizing our ethnocentrism or even racism, and initiating the discovery of the possibility of radically different existential decisions (UNESCO, 2009).

2.4. Gender and interculturality: a necessary relationship

Political ecology was born precisely from the intersection between political economy and cultural ecology; it treats power relations between human groups and their biophysical environments. Its originality and relevance to understand the interculturality in the social management of forest ecosystems is that its approach brings together the social and physical sciences to analyze the social relations of production and questions of access and control about resources. In this way, it is possible to understand the forms of deterioration and environmental degradation to propose environmentally sustainable alternatives (Paulson, 2009, p. 17).



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Interculturality and cultural diversity are two concepts closely associated with a third, the concept of gender. The importance of gender relations and sexuality in the cultural construction of identity and difference is analyzed by Yuval-Davis (2004), who argues that gender relations are at the center of the cultural constructions of the identities. Through traditional power relationships between men and women, in which the masculine is the dominant, it is possible to maintain certain static meanings of nature and culture that are detrimental to women, as they move away from the spaces of power where important decisions about community life are made.

In addressing the issue of indigenous people and peasants, it is noted that they have been almost excluded from the environmental issue, although historically, both the use and management of natural resources have been in the hands of indigenous women and men, afro-descendants and Montubios. Paradoxically, environmental unsustainability affects indigenous women primarily for their roles and attributes in terms of the uses and services that biodiversity provides, while their productive livelihoods are threatened, so “they have a close link with biodiversity and its importance for the cultural and biological reproduction of women, their families and their people” (Pazmino, 2005, p. 73).

In this regard, Solis (2012) says that women are not only victims, but are also active subjects in environmental care and in the construction of a culture of relationships in equality with nature. Thus, the important role of women in the management of biodiversity and biological resources should be recognized, and their participation in the decision-making should be assured at all levels of resource management.

When observing and valuing the contribution of women, some examples of this reality worldwide are obtained:

In a third of the world's households, women are the only source of income, in poor families with two adults, more than half of the disposable income comes from women's income. In addition, women use a comparatively higher proportion of their earnings to the satisfaction of basic needs. Women produce 80% of food in Africa, 60% in Asia and 40% in America. Being the primary managers to provide their families with food, water, fuels, medicines, fiber, animal feed, and other products; women know the importance of the existence of natural and diverse ecosystems (Solis, 2013, p. 45).

From this point of view, if the problems of the women (impoverishment, marginalization, lack of resources, education, political participation,...) or to the inequalities between men and women in the families and communities (imbalance of power, access, control, decision, representation, training...) want to be answered, then It is necessary to take into account and impact not only on women and men of different nationalities and people, but also structural aspects of complex systems and relationships (Paulson, 2007); i.e., the construction of public policies that evidence the needs and interests of different men and women; capacity-building processes of institutional teams to acquire gender and intercultural competence, monitoring and evaluation to account for the effective participation in the use, access and control of the biodiversity benefits in a differentiated way by gender and ethnicity.

The academy has a fundamental role in the approach of these topics, both from epistemology and praxis, because, this way of understanding the complex connections of the transversal axes of gender and interculturality with the biodiversity constitutes an



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opportunity for a work articulated between the community and the university. But, on the basis of the ecology of knowledge that warns the existence of a great amount of know-how throughout the world and part of the budget that “the different know-how can coexist”, is what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) calls “the inexhaustible epistemological diversity of the world”.

3. Methodology

This work has a qualitative approach, to the extent that the person conducting the study is attracted by a wide interpretative, postmodern, feminist and critical sensibility (Hernández, 2010). This qualitative research used in social studies is effective, because the researcher uses the subjectivity, that is, his/her sensibility and rationality when revealing the implications that the reading implies for the comprehension and interpretation of socio-cultural and gender representations with biodiversity.

The bibliographical modality of this work is because the gender and intercultural approach and biodiversity require a documentary approach, i.e. the data collection phase is carried out in places such as libraries, specialized study centers, since these spaces allow a direct approach to primary and secondary sources.

The universe of qualitative research is a living, dynamic, heterogeneous space that reflects on itself. Meanwhile the sample is a portion of that universe, which in this case, is the approach of gender, interculturality and biodiversity that recovers some arguments and positioning towards the topic in an interdisciplinary construct of complex and integral relationships.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Some reflections on gender and intercultural issues and their inexorable relationship with biodiversity arise from theoretical approaches, constitutional mandates and the ecology of knowledge.

Up to date, there are few debates and reflections on the underlying causes of environmental degradation and biodiversity from a gender and intercultural perspective. The diagnoses null the forms of relationship between men and women with biodiversity. This suggests the need to improve the collection of information on the use, knowledge, access to and control over the gender resources that incorporate new collection and analysis variables.

Gender relations are not produced isolated, but are part of other sociocultural systems that receive the influence of other sectors such as economics, the environment and politics, as well as the class, ethnicity, language, nationality, age of people that make up the human group. The discrimination, exclusion and inequality of women, as well as the men and women of different towns and nationalities in Ecuador, have their origin in the patriarchal and colonial structures that still remain. In the inequality system, membership is given by subordinated integration, while in the exclusion system belonging occurs by exclusion.

The need to change the perception that women are not only victims of the environmental degradation, but that they are active in the preservation of biodiversity, in the use of their ancestral knowledge, in the seed selection, among others; as well as in the construction of a culture of relationships that promote equality, justice and inclusion.



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There is a proposal from the constitutional mandate and the planning of the State that expresses the need for new conceptual and methodological frameworks that incorporates gender and intercultural approaches that realize the multiple relationships between people of towns and nationalities and their natural environment, in a broader context that connects local ethnographic, ecological and agricultural research with institutional, historical and global political and economic analyses.

Studies on gender, interculturality and environment in Ecuador evidence the prevalence of principles of neutrality and objectivity in the university curricula and scientific research. These principles prevent teaching from being aware of the androcentric character of the science they practice, and of the interrelation between gender relations and the rest of social relations.

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