Emotion, Space and Society

Fighting for the River: Gender, Body, and Agency in Environmental Struggles, Özge Yaka. University of California Pres, Berkeley, California, US (2023). 243 pp., £23 paperback. ISBN: 978-0520393615.

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Environmental struggles and movements across the world have played a fundamental role in reconceptualising our notions of justice, the environment, as well as the body and the self. This is particularly the case in the struggles for the commons such as the rivers that are being increasingly cast as renewable solutions to the climate crisis despite the consequences of hydropower on local communities and the environment. In this book, Özge Yaka establishes the importance of the body as the central methodological and analytical lens in studying the environmental struggles, focusing on the struggle against small-scale, run-of-the-river hydroelectric power plants (HEPPs) in Turkey.

Yaka presents a powerful story of resistance and attachment across bodies, human and nonhuman, bringing to light often invisible stories of women and their relationship with the rivers they are fighting to protect from the HEPPs. By focusing on the gendered experiences of the everyday interactions and interconnections with the rivers, bringing together feminist phenomenology with environmental theory, the author highlights the urgent need to focus on the sensory, affective and embodied aspects of environmental struggles. The body-centred framework that Yaka develops emerges from the profoundly empirical research as she carefully weaves together complex phenomenological concepts with concrete empirical examples. The rich ethnographic data and powerful quotes illustrate both the strength of the movement and the profoundness of the human and nonhuman entanglement, allowing the author to advance the argument that there is an "excess of relationality" over established notions of environmental justice. It is through this intimate and corporeal relationality that political agency is conditioned.

The first chapter of the book maps out the history of the anti-HEPPs movement in Turkey, describing the diverse motivations across different geographies behind the resistance and the struggle for the commons in the context of the developmentalist and "renewable energy" discourses. Chapter 2 sets out the leading role of women in the struggle, describing it as "the first time in Turkish history that peasant women entered the political scene of activism and protest on such an impressive scale" (51). Central here is the lived, phenomenal body in understanding women's radical political agency that goes beyond

sustaining livelihoods. In Chapter 3, Yaka offers an exploration of sensory, emotional, affective and embodied everyday experiences between bodies of women and bodies of water, and their implications for political agency and resistance. This is further investigated in Chapter 4 which focuses on the role of identity, place, memory and heritage, revealing how different temporalities are spatialised and remembered in and through the river waters, and constituting the corporeal political subjectivities. Building on these insights, in the final chapter of the book Yaka develops the notion of socio-ecological justice to encompass the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman entities and the "already existing" relational ethics and ontologies into the established understandings of justice and sociality.

While a feminist lens is being applied across the book, more detail about Yaka's own position as a researcher within the anti-HEPPs movement would unveil further dynamics on gender, body, agency and the environment. As Yaka sensitively describes the relationship between the women and the rivers, the reader is left wondering about the author's own relationships towards the research participants as well as the rivers. When Yaka describes in one of the ethnographic examples a conversation with a research participant in the city of Fethiye, the reader learns that it "happens to be [the author's] hometown" (41). This opens up crucial questions about the author's own position between an insider and an outsider. Similarly, when Yaka describes being referred to by one of the research participants as "my daughter" (49), it resonates with her later description of the local understanding of a river as "a partner, a relative, a brother, a sister, a friend, a neighbor, a companion, all in all an equal—a nonhuman person/being/entity with whom one has a lifelong, intimate, sentient, and affective relationship" (141). Explicitly addressing the relationality not only between the research participants and the rivers but also the researcher would additionally advance the notion of socio-ecological justice and the understanding of the body-subject as situated.

Fighting for the River: Gender, Body, and Agency in Environmental Struggles is an ethnographically rich and beautifully written book that reveals the profound and affective embeddedness of the body within the networks of environments and ecologies, with significant implications for the conceptions of justice as well as resistance. The book is successful in demonstrating the value of a body-centred perspective on environmental struggles, contributing to the important scholarly and activist efforts to move away from the reductionist understanding of rivers and commons as a "natural resource" and of resistance as a mere defence of livelihoods. It shows the direction for further research on movements, resistance and political agency that recognises transcorporeal connections and the ethical commitments such relationality requires. Further explorations not only of the embeddedness of the bodies of the research participants in the networks of more-than-human relationality, but also of the researcher, would be a significant contribution to feminist methodologies and ethnographies.