

work and interdisciplinary approach that the author developed. An interesting and useful read for any student of development studies.

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TAKING STANDS: GENDER AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Maureen Reed
Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003

REVIEWED BY EMILY EATON

Taking Stands: Gender and the Sustainability of Rural Communities is focused on the activist experiences of women in forestry communities on North Vancouver Island. Reed examines how women have responded to the state's imposition of environmental regulations in the logging industry in the 1990s. Her research, based on focus groups, policy documents, and interviews with fifty women, reveals that women perceive environmental regulation (including the establishment of "protected areas") as threatening to their communities and livelihood. In this book Reed also offers an analysis of the marginalization of women in the process of negotiating and implementing land-use programmes.

Reed begins by considering contemporary debates including the coherence of the category "woman". She is sympathetic to (and incorporates) many of the challenges mounted by "the cultural turn," but argues that gender remains a valid and significant category of inquiry in the forestry communities of the "North Island." Women in these forestry communities share many forms of social marginalization: their

(paid and unpaid) work is exploited, they are often socially excluded from meaningful participation in their communities, they feel disempowered as they lack autonomy and authority, and they are morally excluded in land-use debates. Such realities lead Reed to conclude that "[a] focus on difference may only weaken the situation of women's collective interests in planning debates."

Despite advocating for a political strategy of uniting women, the bulk of this book is dedicated to understanding the diverse forms of activism in which forestry women are involved. One of Reed's strengths is in establishing a balance between the diversity of women's subject positions and the material significance of gender in communities of North Vancouver Island. This balance is established through a focus on diversity in the first five chapters, and a separate examination of the material significance of gender in the last three chapters.

Reed finds that women are active in "managing their communities" through a wide range of community work, including protesting environmental regulation, cleaning local streams, and lobbying for better access to social services. However, women's activism has neither arisen chiefly out of stereotyped roles as mothers/nurturers, nor is it consistent with eco-feminist analyses that see an essential connection between women and nature. Importantly, Reed challenges the binary conceptualisation of activism as being either pro or anti-environmental. Furthermore, she argues for a widening of the definition of activism to include the (significant) political act of affirming the status quo.

In the first pages of her book Reed introduces "feminist environmentalism" as a perspective that "examine[s] how women's social relations to the environment are made and reinforced through their daily activities in specific localities." She suggests that this anti-essentialist framework offers a

better analysis of women's activism than that given by eco-feminism. However, after her initial and brief discussion of feminist environmentalism, she fails to apply it throughout the rest of the work. The reader is left wondering whether later findings and analyses fit with her belief that feminist environmentalism is a better framework.

In her last two chapters the focus shifts away from the multiplicity of women's activism and toward the collective marginalization of women in land-use planning. Reed argues that women's participation has been marginalized in the planning of forestry transition programmes, which is particularly problematic since they are significantly affected by changing policies and practices. She offers an important critique of the way in which the state has engaged in land-use planning and also of the effects of state-sponsored transition programmes. She argues that the provincial government's Commission on Resources and Environment had the effect of reproducing dominant power relations in forestry communities. For example, the Commission's commitment to social sustainability came to revolve around men's jobs; all other social issues were considered "community issues" and therefore outside of the scope of the land use strategy.

Maureen Reed's book on gender in forestry communities on North Vancouver Island will be of interest to a number of different readers. While this book is focused centrally on the diversity of women's activism in forestry communities, a wide variety of topics are explored including the marginalization of rural communities, anti/environmentalism, policy changes around forestry in British Columbia, women and work, the construction of the "other," and the politics of land-use planning. The book is an important read for environmentalists as it challenges us to understand the complexity and contradictions of anti/environmental action.