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## 45. Emotional political ecology

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Feminist scholarship has enriched political ecology and resources management literatures by attesting to the central importance of gender relations in resource struggles of various kinds across places (Agarwal, 1992; Rocheleau et al., 1996). Recent work builds on this contribution by demonstrating that gender is performed and negotiated through such struggles while involving power relations that condition bodies, spaces and environments (Gururani, 2002; Harris, 2006; Resurreccion and Elmhirst, 2008; Sultana, 2009a). This scholarship renders a complex picture – notably showing how gender-related subjectivities are negotiated and embodied through social processes and ecological practices while intersecting with other subject positions, such as class, race, age or caste. How gender shapes access to, control over and ownership of resources across different subjectivities and geographical locations has been a key theme in feminist political ecology.

The present chapter argues that this research sub-field can be further strengthened by assessing the complex emotional geographies that inform resource management. Such a focus helps to elucidate the conspicuous but also hidden ways that this management can be conceived of as an emotional process defining everyday life. This connection has been scarcely made in feminist political ecology, let alone in the wider research field of which it is part. Yet the emotional geographies literature abounds with insights that are just waiting to be adapted to the topics addressed in political ecology (e.g. Bondi, 2005; Davidson et al., 2005; Pile, 2010; Sharp, 2009; Smith et al., 2009).

In this chapter, I promote such a process by outlining some of the elements of an emotional political ecology approach. In so doing, I demonstrate the importance of heeding the complex emotions and meanings attached to resource access, use and conflict in order to better understand the emotionality thereby engaged in everyday struggles. Not only does this lead to greater nuance in understanding resources struggles and politics; it also rejects the idea that ‘real’ scholarship is about ‘rational’ social interactions over resources that leaves emotive realities about how resources are accessed, used and fought over firmly to one side. Indeed, (feminist) political ecology will be immeasurably strengthened when often abstract articulations of ‘resource struggles’ and ‘resource conflicts’ are grounded in embodied emotional geographies of places, peoples and resources, enabling enhanced comprehension of how resources and emotions intermingle in everyday resource management practices. An emotional political ecology approach thus elucidates how emotions matter in nature–society relations.

How are emotions to be understood in such an endeavor? Work on emotional geographies provides a useful starting-point here. Davidson et al. (2005: 3) define emotional geography as one that ‘attempts to understand emotion – experientially and conceptually – in terms of its socio-*spatial* mediation and articulation rather than as

entirely interiorized subjective mental states' (emphasis in original). Scholars argue that emotions are fluid while being relationally produced between peoples and places, as opposed to being a phenomenon that reflects individual human subjectivities (Davidson et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009). At the same time, emotions are always embodied experiences signifying, among other things, that a thorough understanding of specific sites and contexts is a prerequisite for any serious research endeavor – a point that sits remarkably well with a core ethos in (feminist) political ecology (Rocheleau et al., 1996; Robbins, 2012).

However, such thinking has received greatest attention in cultural and feminist geography (e.g. Bondi, 2005; Sharp, 2009; Thien, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006), while scarcely making an appearance in political ecology including the feminist sub-field – as even a cursory glance at an array of key texts here affirms (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Rocheleau et al., 1996; Bryant and Bailey, 1997; Peet and Watts, 2004; Robbins, 2012). Yet this is surely a grave oversight: emotions matter in resource struggles. Thus they influence outcomes of practices and processes of resource access/use/control while shaping how resources-related interactions are actually experienced in everyday lives. While some research has shown how specific environments and landscapes produce varied emotional geographies (Dallman et al., 2013; Graybill, 2013), little attention is given to assessing how environmental degradation and resource crises can produce differentiated emotions that influence the very ways that resources are imagined, accessed, used and controlled on a daily basis.

In contrast, I explore precisely such issues as part of the elaboration of an emotional political ecology approach. To do so, I build the argument through a detailed case study drawn from my own extensive fieldwork over the years – namely about water and arsenic contamination in rural Bangladesh – while heeding the general warnings of scholars such as Bondi (2005), Pile (2010) and Sharp (2009) not to objectify emotions of the researched in this endeavor. I thus aim to advance understanding by using insights from emotional geography to enrich explanations of everyday resource struggles, politics and conflicts without being reductionist, ahistorical or 'feminizing' emotions. I relate this work to political ecology and resources management scholarship on access and conflict (Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Ostrom, 1990; Peluso and Watts, 2001; Ribot and Peluso, 2003; Sikor and Lund, 2009) and writings about meaning and understanding in resource struggles (Moore, 2005; Gururani, 2002). This combination of literatures helps me to think through the messiness of everyday politics and struggles over a critical resource such as water. While the processes of access, use and control of resources produce different kinds of emotional geographies, my concern is with the multifaceted aspects of 'sufferings' of people seeking safe water in my case study setting (detailed below). Attention to the emotional geographies of water here are important in explaining the ways that feeling subjects relate to water and how water mediates social relations of resource management. As this chapter argues, therefore, conflicts over resources are thus as much about embodied emotions, feelings and lived experiences as they are about property rights and entitlements, long the focus in political ecology. The framework developed here can be applied to other natural resources and thereby expand current theorizations in political ecology and nature–society studies.

## WATER AND ARSENIC IN BANGLADESH

Elsewhere I explore gendered subjectivities surrounding Bangladesh's arsenic water-scapes, underscoring how these are reflected in daily practices encompassing bodies, places and spaces (e.g. inside/outside the homestead), intersectional social axes (e.g. class) and geological factors (e.g. locational variations in arsenic deposits and local hydrogeology that affect whether water wells are contaminated or not) (Sultana, 2009a). There are both subtle and conspicuous connections to water (of different types, locations, overground/underground, quantities, qualities, reliability and accessibility) that complicate how people make sense of water crises in their lives (see also Sultana, 2006, 2007, 2009a). In this chapter, I focus on the nuanced ways that gender–water relations inflect people's sense of suffering in tracing the emotional geographies of water in rural Bangladesh. To examine the ways that people cope with, respond to and relate to different types of water, I explore the ways that arsenic contamination of drinking water has resulted in new meanings and realities of access, use and conflict in the micro-practices of water in everyday life. In this regard, context, connections and circumstances are very important in the ways that emotions influence how people relate to one another as well as their relationship to water. Since women fetch water for their households in rural Bangladesh (as is common globally in household gendered divisions of labor, as feminist political ecology has long pointed out), it is the women who feel most directly the pain/struggle/tensions about being able to provide sufficient safe water for their families. The water crisis is thus highly gendered. Day-to-day living is not just about obtaining sufficient resources, as the circumstances and struggles to achieve those resources take a toll and impact the emotional as well as material lives of women and their families. This has direct bearing on the ways water is imagined, accessed, used and fought over in a locality.

Throughout rural Bangladesh, there is considerable disparity in water contamination levels within short distances, as geologic heterogeneity of arsenic in the aquifer resulted in variable concentrations of arsenic showing up in drinking water (Smith et al., 2000). Most drinking water is obtained from tube-wells, which are generally hand-pumped to draw groundwater from aquifers. But the discovery of carcinogenic, tasteless, odorless and colorless arsenic in drinking water in the late 1990s has resulted in millions of tube-wells becoming unsafe as the water was deemed poisonous. Approximately 35 million people are estimated to be exposed to mortality and morbidity from slow poisoning due to chronic exposure to arsenic (called arsenicosis), which can take years to manifest health complications (such as cancer, organ failure and ultimately death). Few viable alternative water sources exist as surface water sources are generally polluted. Indeed, this is why people switched to groundwater in the 1970s and 1980s, with massive promotion of tube-well technology by government and international donors, leading to over 10 million tube-wells being installed both privately and by public institutions. As a result, these wells came to dot the landscape as the main source of drinking water, and households would save up to install their own well (as anyone owning land can install one).

However, the relative ease of obtaining water with widespread introduction of tube-wells was short-lived, as official testing for arsenic proceeded and soon resulted in some of the wells being painted red (if contaminated) and others being painted green (if

safe to consume from). Since it is impossible for humans to detect the presence of trace amounts of arsenic in water without scientific testing, it is difficult to gauge immediately if one is drinking arsenic-contaminated water or not. Knowing the status of the water source is thus important (i.e. safe or unsafe, green or red, or even knowing the levels of arsenic in the water).

The implications have been severe. Most households have had to find other water sources when their tube-wells were labeled unsafe. Due to arsenic's random spatial heterogeneity and the uneven distribution of tube-wells and homesteads, some villages have high numbers of red wells, with few green ones or alternative options. Generally, deep tube-wells that access the deep aquifer are mostly safe as it is largely arsenic-free, whereas most shallow tube-wells (which are much cheaper and thus more prevalent) access the shallow aquifer where there are high amounts of arsenic in the sediments. This spatiality of safe water has resulted in a spatialization of power as well as hardship (Sultana, 2006). Where people live is vital to their water security, as proximity to safe sources is crucial in influencing whether or not people try to obtain safe water. Similarly, those who control a safe water source have additional powers over those who do not. While this tends to play out along class lines (e.g. wealthier households can afford deeper wells), it is not completely clear-cut, as the distribution of arsenic can disrupt precise correlations. Thus many poor neighborhoods have green tube-wells while some wealthier areas have red ones. As such, arsenic has helped create a situation where safe water control is both a status symbol and a source of power (Sultana, 2007). It is in such waterscapes that women and girls weave their way through labyrinths of red and green tube-wells to fetch water on a daily basis for their families, confronting new and old social realities, as well as embodied emotions of conflict, cooperation and control.

## NEGOTIATING WATER ACCESS, USE AND CONTROL

As anyone with land and tube-well technology can secure access to groundwater, those without property or money to install wells must negotiate user rights through social relations (e.g. formal or informal kinship, patron–client relations). Control of water is thus different from access to water, as some people may enjoy rights to both and others only to the latter (Rangan, 1997). Furthermore, secure access is important for those not owning/controlling their own water source. Reliability of the tube-well in producing safe water of sufficient quantity and quality is also a factor that influences patterns of access, concentrating people at sites that produce safe water and have easier access/use rules. In understanding access here, it must be noted that decisions are not based on some 'rational' *a priori* mechanism, but rather reflect a fiercely negotiated reality involving multiple claims, identities, relations and emotions. The struggle over access is thus the product of individual needs and decisions, as well as many other factors such as institutions, relationships and emotions.

In theorizing access in relation to ownership or control of water, I draw on the notion of access articulated by Ribot and Peluso (2003: 153), where it is the ability to benefit from things (natural resources, material objects, institutions, people) rather than a right to things that matters (see also Sikor and Lund, 2009). Access rules are also often tied

to frequency and amount of water taken: they are not unconditional. How access is gained, maintained and changed varies over time and place, meaning that access patterns are not static. Access to safe water in rural Bangladesh is thus predicated on diverse factors such as ownership of land or a tube-well, socio-spatial location in relation to a well, membership in a water committee (for a communal well) or kinship and/or patron–client relations that enable access. In areas with many red tube-wells and few green ones, not everyone has guaranteed access to safe water even if a tube-well is next door due to formal or informal mechanisms constraining access (Sultana, 2009b). And yet, while access is often discussed in terms of proximity, distance, time needed and physical burdens, it is also linked to socio-cultural factors such as class barriers, power relations, gendered spaces and the sheer emotional labor needed to negotiate access. Most people interviewed in the course of my research noted that, to sustain access to a safe source, it was generally important to maintain a good relationship with the owners, often pay a fee, clean the area, give free labor in exchange for water, or pay hired labor to get water. Ensuring that existing patron–client relationships or kinship networks were sound was important to obtain water from sources that were not one’s own. True, some people obtain water from government or institutional sources where most people had rights of access, but these wells were often poorly maintained or broken. Hence it is the most-needy villagers who generally rely on public sites; but where they have to find water elsewhere, they seek to capitalize on religious ties or political affiliations. Overall, access for many people can be uncertain due to the presence of arsenic, the shifting distribution of safe/unsafe wells, and broader societal relations.

Precarious access to a necessary resource such as water poses logistical and material challenges as well as emotional ones, especially for women. The ability to gain and maintain access to safe sources is entangled with a host of issues that directly affect the water-fetchers and their everyday lives. Access is never fully secure, and has to be re-ensured and re-articulated over time and space. The tube-well may break down or be shut down, or the water may be found to be unsafe; physical access to the well may be muddy/slippery, broken or blockaded; owners may suddenly decide to not give any more water, ration how much can be taken and when, or request favors in return. Each household without a well must continuously navigate such uncertainties. Diverse factors come into play in producing everyday insecurity, here having a direct bearing on how people relate to each other in a household as well as between households competing for water. People often compromise on quality in order to ensure sufficient quantity, as water is an essential daily need. Quenching of thirst as well as cooking food were deemed to be needs that could not be avoided or substituted, even if it meant taking risks of consuming unhealthy water. Making such choices is emotionally difficult for many women as they are aware they are jeopardizing the health of family members to ensure that at least some water is available (Sultana, 2012).

## EMBODIED EMOTIONS, WATER ACCESS AND SUFFERINGS

People spoke about resource access and conflicts through the emotions they provoke, most notably through the notion of ‘suffering’. Analyzing the various forms of

suffering that are invoked highlights the emotional geographies of water, where suffering is inter-subjective and produced through the realities of access, use and control of water discussed above. Scholars such as Klouzal (2003: 256) argue that focusing on suffering enriches development research: 'Attending to emotional pain can heighten awareness of women's agency. By looking at what women's experiences mean to them, scholars gain insight into under-represented perspectives.' Similarly, a notion of suffering is identified by Moore (2005) as a way that people make claims to entitlements and land rights in Africa, albeit more in relation to historical dispossession and struggles to reclaim land in colonial and post-colonial contexts. In medical anthropological studies, some scholars have looked at emotional distress and suffering caused by water scarcity (Das, 1997; Ennis-McMillan, 2001; Tapias, 2006; Wutich and Ragsdale, 2008). Without objectifying suffering, I believe paying attention to multiple forms of sufferings can explain resources access and conflict issues more deeply and broadly.

I found that people articulated their suffering [*'koshto'*] vis-à-vis water and arsenic to directly and indirectly claim access and user rights to safe water. This is conveyed in two main ways: first, '*panir koshto*' ['water hardship'] or '*panir jonno koshto*' ['suffering for water'], indicating lack of safe water access, use and control; and second, '*panir theke koshto*' ['suffering from water'], indicating the ways that arsenic contaminated water has affected their lives (e.g. ill health from arsenic poisoning) (Sultana, 2012). These phrases describe the ways that lack of safe water affects people as well as signaling how claims to safe water are made. Thus 'suffering for water' as well as 'suffering from water' are simultaneous claims made on water – that lack of safe water causes hardship, as well as that use of unsafe water causes hardship, both individually as well as collectively. In both cases, water affects lives through its quantity and quality, access and use, and the sufferings that are produced. Therefore, public and private expressions of the sufferings reflect the wide range of emotional and physical experiences that occur in relation to water and the claims that people often make to access safe water.

Since switching to safe tube-wells and sharing safe water has been a key official recommendation made to people, various invocations are made to access/use safe water when people do not have control or ownership of safe sources. People often invoke cultural and religious moral obligations to share water in order to secure access; others invoke sufferings and poverty to generate sympathy in order to obtain water. Overall, sharing water is deemed to be a religious and customary duty, and people seem more sensitized to water hardship arising from awareness about arsenic. In general, most are willing to share in moments of crisis as long as it does not impinge on their needs or those of their family. But this varies across people and places.

As a result, sufferings related to water often result from various manifestations of struggles and conflicts over water (both private and public). Further, moral arguments are often as important as material and discursive struggles over natural resources, highlighting that these struggles are often manifestations of broader non-material struggles (Turner, 2004). Political ecologists thus need to analyze here the different types of conflicts and their meanings, being careful in the process not to undertake reductionist research – for instance of a sort that simplifies complex village life and conflict to the point where it misses different types and tenors of conflict as well as

their relative importance. Indeed, the textures and nuances of conflicts must be accounted for in a manner that thereby ensures that overt and public struggles do not overshadow hidden and more subtle ones. Such analysis enables deeper understanding of how struggles, hardships and emotional resource geographies interconnect and are reflected in the everyday experience of resource management.

This is apparent in how women described different degrees of overt conflict over water. Thus they used terms such as '*jhogra/kaijja*' [argument], '*chillani*' [shouting], '*kotha katakati*' [exchange of words], '*dhakka-dhakki/thela-theli*' [pushing/shoving], '*gondogol/l'golmal*' [skirmish/conflict], '*jhamela/birokto*' [hassle], '*jontrona/betha*' [pain] and '*kotha shona*' [verbal insults]. The more subtle ways they related struggles over water were '*oshonmani/opoman*' [humiliation], '*ijjate lage*' [loss of pride], '*chhoto kora*' [feeling small], '*morjadahani*' [feeling belittled], '*bhoganti*' [stress], '*mone dukkho*' [being hurt], '*lajja laga*' [feeling ashamed], '*mone aghat paoa*' [emotional distress], '*mon kharap/koshto*' [feeling sad], '*akangkha*' [anxiety] and '*bishonno*' [depressed]. People narrated these ranges of their '*abeg/onubhuti*' [emotions] and the contours of 'suffering' in individual interviews, group discussions and informal chats.

Contaminated water and subsequent strife over safe water access had affected the ways that people related to each other as well as influencing social power relations in everyday life. Various verbal expressions of relational emotions of distress, sorrow, rage, fear, frustration, worry and anxiety are often accompanied by physical expressions of silent tears, crying, sighing, keeping one's head down, and looking away. Emotional distress becomes part of the process of obtaining water each day, in terms of where to get water from and how to address social hierarchies and power relations in the practices of water fetching. The embodied emotions of water are experienced in different spaces and to varying degrees, depending on the situation on any given day. The sufferings are felt corporeally and viscerally, while being expressed and articulated in diverse ways in their everyday lives. Emotional geographies were thus made through places, spaces and water. The embodied pain of hauling water, the emotional pain from being told off while fetching water, the sense of belittlement felt when having to fetch water from a source not their own or sanctioned by the owners, and the fear linked to fetching water at night from distant places are common experiences informing everyday practice. Similarly, fear and worry when children are consuming unsafe water is accompanied by joy and relief at being able to provide arsenic-free and safe water. Such emotions are negotiated and experienced routinely in landscapes where there are few safe water sources. These daily journeys are thus infused with various emotions and experiences with regard to water.

Paying attention to emotions also shows how people devise complex strategies both to access existing water rights and to maneuver to gain new access to water in order to meet everyday needs. The narratives of experiences and sentiments that people bring to bear on the water crisis and their sufferings are also marshaled to enhance their resource claims and to invoke guilt/sympathy in order to get water. People actively maneuver and shift their positions while performing diverse identities in the process. While power hierarchies play into such emotional topographies, a common understanding about the suffering of children without water, for instance, can become an important means to shape the giving and taking of water among differently located people.

At the same time, the notion of suffering was linked to a sense of womanhood for most of the women – that is, a common bond that tied them together as mothers, daughters or daughters-in-law. Even if the degree or nature of suffering varied, women mostly shared their sentiments with each other. Indeed, such inter-subjective relations were a common bond that they felt tied them together as well as validating their gender roles in the household and community (see also Gururani, 2002). Such inter-subjective emotions are linked to gender norms and constructions of gender in many places.

In addition, sympathy and empathy were found to be important components in social narratives of suffering from/for water. The bonds formed here were influenced not just by water scarcity and poisoning issues, but also by commonalities of experiences and the sharing of narratives. Similarly, inequalities linked to the experience of suffering are emphasized by those who claim that many others do not face these problems or do not empathize or sympathize with households that do (both in relation to accessing safe water as well as suffering from water poisoning). Articulations about such inequalities in exposure and suffering is generally shared among people in similar positions, but is also brought up with others in order to renegotiate water access. These realities explain why people access certain water sources rather than others, and why they may even share a scarce resource with some people due to emotional bonds formed through similar experiences of having to deal with water crises.

Emotional geographies of water thus comprise not just sentiments brought to the fore due to the water crises, but also the various meanings that attach to the physical process of water-fetching and water-sharing. These include meanings that are attached to places where the wells are located, as well as the spaces traversed to get there (e.g. private or public, welcoming or uninviting), the quality and safety of the water, the ease of access to the water and being able to take as much as needed, the difficulty or ease of carrying the amount of water needed, encounters with others in the daily foray in searching for water and the outcome of those encounters, and the events that take place at the water well itself. A range of emotional sentiments comes into play here. Thus, and beyond commonly felt sufferings and pain, there are also such elements as the recounting of previous pleasure in fetching and/or controlling safer/closer water resources, of feeling relief in being able to obtain safe water with ease, of talking about the joy of having one's own uncontaminated well or of the pleasure in going far to get water as an escape out of the house. Emotions of '*shanti*' [peace] and '*shukh*' [happiness] of drinking safe water, especially from one's own well, contrast with the sufferings the majority of villagers now face. However, it is also important to highlight the '*anondo/khushi*' [delight/joy], '*shachchondo*' [relief] and '*poritripto*' [contentment] felt by those few with some stable access to safe water or who benefit from occasional access to sufficient amounts of safe water (in a situation in which they generally do not do so). While such emotions were less common, they are nonetheless not insignificant. In the midst of a habitually dire situation, the small pleasures of having safe and healthy water (and not suffering from arsenicosis linked to the drinking of unsafe water) are meaningful.

Being mindful of the language of emotions and speech acts, and not objectifying the individualized expression of emotions but viewing them as inter-subjective and co-produced, allows us to understand the multidimensionality and importance of emotions in everyday life vis-à-vis water and arsenic. The relational nature of emotions



explains the interactions and connections that people have to each other and to water. The intimate and necessary relationships that people have to life-giving water as well as the social relationships that people have with each other simultaneously constitute the emotional landscapes of water. These speech acts, expressions and physical actions become part of everyday relationships. The feelings, thoughts and actions related to water-fetching and well-sharing (both as an owner or as one who has to share from someone else) are entangled in larger resource geographies in arsenic-affected areas.

Paying attention to these emotional geographies forces scholars to consider processes and relations that are central to (feminist) political ecology research yet that have often been neglected. It helps to build a better understanding of how people respond to environmental change, and to what end. Analyzing these narratives and invocations encourages us to understand more fully the hidden ways that resource geographies affect everyday lives. It also allows us to understand how emotions are part-and-parcel of the ways that people access and use a resource, one that is viscerally important to their very survival.

## CONFLICTING EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONS OF CONFLICT

How much emotions really matter in situations of struggle for access and control of resources is brought into the open in everyday encounters where the manipulation of self and of others is significant in the access to water in a given area. Hierarchies of power and social differences are felt particularly acutely by those seeking safe water that is not from their own well; often, various forms of conflict were the result. Some of the reasons people mentioned that were thought to have provoked or aggravated conflicts related to differences of class, power (between individuals and households), religion and political affiliation. Meanwhile, arguments, noise and crowding at safe tube-wells angered well-owners who often then restricted access to the water.

As many women face rejections and restrictions on accessing and using a safe well, they often resort to using unsafe water in order to minimize confrontation and strife. Indeed, public emotions such as shame, embarrassment and guilt often regulate social behavior, influencing conformity or norm-following. These come to play important roles in water–society relations, where public emotions influence who obtains water from where, when, how much and to what end. Some women (and their household members) will carefully regulate their behavior and emotions around those they are dependent on for safe water so as to not upset tenuous but vital relations. Uncertainty is here common. Thus any social infractions such as disagreements, perceived lack of respect (i.e. as seen by well owners towards themselves), insufficient expressions of gratitude or provision of free labor (in return for safe water) can jeopardize the right to access a safe well. As a result, fetching water comes to involve not only physical labor but also emotional labor in the guise of maintaining appearances of deference, subservience and conviviality (cf. Scott, 1990).

Having to ‘keep quiet’ or overlook any insults or humiliation were common strategies women employed in order to keep their water access somewhat secure. Social relationships and encounters thus affected daily experiences of water, with public emotions often tightly controlled. In contrast, private expressions of emotions that

result from such public experiences involved complaints to family members and/or the sharing of experiences with other women who face similar challenges and distress. Sometimes, though, it was simply most prudent to keep these emotions to oneself. This is particularly the situation for young daughters-in-law, who are generally burdened with the task of fetching water throughout the day for their in-laws, but who fear rebuke and punishment if they do not provide sufficient amounts of water in a timely manner. Their emotional realities are compounded not only by the challenges of access outside the home but also by negotiating relationships and being the 'dutiful' daughter-in-law inside the home. As a result, managing one's emotions as a result of the difficulties of accessing water or using a water source thus becomes wrapped up in the everyday practices of household water management. Conversely, social relationships and friendships formed and maintained as part of the labor of gathering water with other vulnerable women, or through sharing common sorrows and hardships with both men and women who also suffer badly from the water crisis, become ways that people cope with the daily struggles in their lives. Similar experiences can thus forge bonds or splinter people apart.

Private and public displays of emotion are brought to the fore in everyday encounters, as women must navigate not only their own experiences with water access and control, but also with each other in a context of differential powers and rights. The emotional labor involved in maintaining water access (as well as conversations about it) is thus palpable here. Such realities influenced the waterscapes that women could and could not access, and how that spilled over into other aspects of their lives – such as arguments at wells that went on to sour relations between entire families, or the joy of being able to pull funds together to invest in a well that bonded families more closely, or the respite felt when safe water was closer to one's home and enabled women to spend more time doing other tasks. Such varied emotions thus affected the ways that women came to relate to water management practices in their locality, and how they sought to deal with the overall water contamination situation.

That conflict or struggle over water can be publicly manifested (e.g. heated conversations or exchanges of words) as well as being expressed in a less public fashion demonstrates the spatiality of emotional geographies and the ways it is gendered. Yet public displays of conflict that involve 'small' skirmishes between women at the tube-well location usually do not garner much wider sympathy or attention. While women may be willing to share their troubles with close confidants, many other women often keep it to themselves. This feminization of the experience of conflict, as well as an associated chronic undervaluation of women's physical and emotional labor involved in doing this work, may explain the lack of attention given to water-access issues in many households and by policymakers: it is simply expected that the womenfolk will stoically fetch water each day in order to fulfill their gendered duties without resistance or challenge. Overall, while women are facing increasing hardship to fetch water, many feel that it is their duty to bear the sufferings and continue at whatever cost. In this manner, therefore, water conflicts and experiences are devalued by household members (often but not always the males), as these apparently only impinge on women's labor time, relations and emotions.

And yet, since difficulties of obtaining safe water affect the water consumption habits and exposure to arsenic of all family members, conflicts and experiences at the

water source have a direct bearing on the health and wellbeing of others beyond the person fetching the water. When obtaining water from a safe source is physically, socially or emotionally too difficult, women often resort to using unsafe wells (their own or nearby ones). Moreover, in many instances the struggles that women face in fetching safe water do become broader conflicts, especially between households. The latter thus involves more people than those facing day-to-day water-fetching chores, and can take a variety of forms and tenors.

While the arsenic contamination situation has created an environment where social tensions can easily erupt at water sources, the nature of conflicts is also mediated by the trade-offs people are willing to make at any given moment. If it is worth battling it out to obtain water, some people will take the risk. Others would rather safeguard existing patron–client relationships in order to gain on other fronts (e.g. sharecropping agreements, political patronage). The gendered and classed nature and scale of the conflict is thus important, as women may argue at water points but then resolve the situation in whatever ways they deem fit, rather than escalating the matter to the household scale. In other instances, households become deeply involved in conflicts over water and its management. As such, the tenor of the conflict, and the scale at which it occurs, are important aspects in understanding the ways that arsenic and water have come to play a role in influencing everyday life. Conflicts at water sources have the potential to spillover and ruin social relations among groups of people. Hence arsenic can poison not just individual bodies and families but the entire social fabric in a locality as well as the emotional ties that bind people together.

## CONCLUSION

My goal in this chapter was to push the boundaries of theorizing in political ecology broadly, and feminist political ecology specifically, to engage with literature on emotional geographies in order to develop an emotional political ecology approach. Nuanced, rich and productive analyses are then possible that can greatly expand current debates to better explain why and how specific nature–society relations play out the way they do. Through the case of arsenic-related water crises in rural Bangladesh, I demonstrated that the emotional geographies of water access, use, control and conflict mediate the ways that water comes to affect everyday life in places of water scarcity. In this instance, the joys and relief of having safe potable water coexist with the pain, fear, despair, conflicts and overall sufferings *for* and *from* water, where emotions saturate everyday water–society relations. Experiences and conflicts over water are lived, felt and embodied by variously situated subjects in their daily struggles for safe water. Thus broader social relations of power and gendered subjectivities are re/negotiated and re/produced in water–society relations in which emotions come to play a key role.

Analyzing the emotional geographies of resource access, use and control thereby allows us to better understand the lived experiences of such realities, and to demonstrate how emotions and embodied subjectivities play a role in the ways that natural resources come to influence everyday life. The messiness and entanglements in nature–society relations are better explained through closer analysis of complexities that exist, thus enabling us more clearly to understand how and why people relate to,

use and find meaning in resources in the ways they do. Such an emotional political ecology approach encourages scholars to explain resource politics, struggles and access/conflict – themes that are central to (feminist) political ecology scholarship – as being about more than the resource itself (and its ‘rational’ use) or the socio-political power relations involved, but also about the diverse emotions set in motion as these influence the practices and decisions people make in everyday resource use, control and conflict.

How might this emotional political ecology approach be further elaborated? One area would be to explore the role of other types (or combinations) of emotions than those featured in this chapter. Thus scholars might advance complex aspects of emotions such as hope, fear and anger as they inform nature–society relations. A second area could meanwhile assess emotional topographies as they relate to other types of resources – timber and non-timber forest products or fish and other marine products, for example. Here, the ‘unruly materiality’ of the resource world (Bakker and Bridge, 2006) becomes entwined with the vicissitudes and complexities of the emotional world in a manner yet to be seriously explored in political ecology. A third area might unpack in greater detail the ‘public–private’ continuum of emotional expression to understand how, where and with what effects such expression assumes a more or less public and private form (and indeed how ‘public’ and ‘private’ perhaps come to be defined differently across places and times). A final area could investigate the sorts of emotional trade-offs that occur among people as different resource management issues occur simultaneously, and hence require simultaneous emotional and political negotiations. In aggregate, these sorts of topics underscore the great promise of an emotional political ecology approach that is likely to conceptually and empirically enhance research in (feminist) political ecology significantly in the years to come.

## NOTE

- \* This chapter is adapted and thoroughly revised from the following and is used with permission: Sultana, F. (2011), ‘Suffering for water, suffering from water: emotional geographies of resource access, control and conflict’, *Geoforum*, **42**, 163–72.

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