

'They Are Not of This House': The Gendered Costs of Drinking Water's Commodification

KATHLEEN O'REILLY

While women's participation is considered a key element of the sustainability plan of the drinking water supply system, some villagers in Rajasthan do not count women in the households while paying common water charges. This paper explores the social, political and environmental implications of not counting girls as household members and drinkers of water. It tries to find answers to the following questions: What are the implications of girls' non-payment for the cost of drinking water in a shared system? What might girls' non-payment mean in terms of the gendered sustainability goals of the project? What are the implications for women's and girls' political subjectivity, especially where natural resources are concerned? The paper also addresses a gap in the political ecology literature with respect to the gender dimensions of neo-liberal processes in the water sector by suggesting a variety of impacts when girls are excluded from water payment.

For decades now, the Union Government of India, state governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have worked to provide rural villages across the country with an accessible, clean drinking water supply (Singh et al 2008). Coverage stands at 79% for the country (ibid). Very often these projects aim to tie together community and women's participation with sustainability goals for the new system (Wallace and Coles 2005; Ivens 2008). In one such drinking water project in rural Rajasthan, community participation involved villagers beginning to pay for water and maintaining the system inside village boundaries. Women's participation was also a key element of the supply system sustainability plan, so it was surprising when some villagers reported that households paid for the drinking water of all members, except girls.

Since 1997, I have studied the implementation and outcomes of this Rajasthan drinking water supply project. In 2008, my research assistant, Richa Dhanju and I conducted research in the project area in order to test water quality, assess supply system conditions and analyse state-citizen relations in the post-project phase. In the very first village we visited we were told that "girls were not charged for water" (*ladkiyon ka paisa nahiin lagtaa*). As one mixed group of men and women explained, "girls get married and they go to another house. They are not of this house." In rural Rajasthan, as with other patrilocal societies in India, girls leave their natal home upon marriage and join their husbands' families (Agarwal 1996). As villagers saw it, girls are not household members until they join their husbands' family, therefore, they are not counted as water consumers before they are married. In this paper, I explore the social, political, and environmental implications of not counting girls as household members and drinkers of water. I want to suggest that "girls' non-payment" (used here to mean that girls are not counted or charged for water) may appear as a straightforward discrimination, but to go beyond that initial judgment is to discover the broader impacts and necessary practices connected to such a decision.

This paper seeks to contribute to scholarly work on gender and water by exploring the following questions: what are the wider implications of girls' non-payment for the cost of drinking water in a shared system? What might girls' non-payment mean in terms of the gendered sustainability goals of the project? What are the implications for women's and girls' political subjectivity, especially where natural resources are concerned? I answer these questions guided by feminist political ecology and a large, interdisciplinary literature on gender and water, whose insights range from equity to participation to neo-liberal governance. I begin

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with a brief introduction to the drinking water supply project, then turn to existing feminist research on water in order to suggest that gender, water and payment intersect in ways that supply complicated answers to the questions posed above.

1 Paying for Water in Rajasthan

The drinking water project began in the early 1990s and was completed in 2005, having connected approximately 378 villages and two towns to drinking water through public standposts (taps). The Government of Rajasthan (GOR) owns the water supply but decentralisation has occurred – villagers are expected to manage and maintain the system inside their own village (O'Reilly and Dhanju in review). Villagers also now pay for water that they previously got for free (O'Reilly 2006a). The GOR relies on community participation through village water committees for village scale infrastructure maintenance (e.g. tap replacement) and bill collection. Every village has a single meter at its entrance that measures the amount of water the village uses monthly. Each household pays a portion of the metered bill based on the number of members and livestock per family. A dedicated group of NGO workers that I call the Project Social Side (PSS; a pseudonym) was responsible for generating community participation during the implementation phase that would support decentralised management and payment for water in the post-project phase, i.e. after 2005 (O'Reilly 2007).

Project plans assumed a gendered division of labour that naturalised women's water work (e.g. water collection for use in housework), and built on those assumptions by expecting that women, because they were those who relied on the system the most, would be the most eager and reliable to maintain it (O'Reilly 2006a). Women's participation would "...serve the purpose of making the water supply system sustainable in the long run" (PSS (nd), *Handbook on Women's Participation*). Women's empowerment and self-help (i.e. income generation) were secondary goals (PSS ibid). PSS staff involved women in the project in a variety of activities, including: representatives to village water committees; public tap caretakers; members of women's groups; income-generating activities and health education. Over the years I studied the project, a majority of PSS staff signalled through their words and practices some ambivalence about the importance of women's participation in the project (O'Reilly 2006b). Through their discourses and practices, however, they forwarded assumptions that all women were responsible for drinking water supply and payment. I have no field notes indicating that PSS staff suggested girls should be excluded as household members who pay for water. PSS staff may not have been convinced that women's participation would lead to project sustainability, nevertheless they promoted existing gender roles associated with water.

In 2008, over a period of six weeks, Richa Dhanju and I visited at least one village across 37 project subdivisions for a total of 47 villages, 43 of which received project water. We tested water quality whenever water was available, for a total of 33 villages (O'Reilly and Dhanju under review). We met and spoke with residents of each village neighbourhood served by a public tap. We asked questions about water quality and quantity, payment and

maintenance practices, contact between the GOR, villagers and other project actors and local social changes (e.g. caste-based conflict). Together we recorded, transcribed and translated villagers' remarks from Marwari or Hindi to English.

The drinking water supply payment system was based on *angaa* – a traditional system of water payment that divides the cost of water consumed by the total number of water consumers (people and livestock) in the village, giving a unit price. Each household pays the unit price multiplied by its number of members and livestock. In most villages, one animal counted as one person. *Angaa* as a traditional village payment system was somehow expected to be more egalitarian than other ways of paying for drinking water; however, out of the 43 villages receiving project water, 10 villages did not charge girls for water – roughly one quarter, or 23%, of all villages. We asked in every village if girls paid for water, after hearing in the first village we visited that girls did not pay. There were no obvious similarities among villages that chose not to charge girls, nor were there any clear dissimilarities between villages that did and those that did not. As matter-of-fact, as the villagers were that girls should not pay, in other villages, people were just as matter-of-fact that they should. In one village, a young man thought our question as to whether girls paid so odd that we had to explain that in other villages that girls do not pay. It had not occurred to him before that they might not.

Payment for water in project villages stood at nearly 100%. Villagers reported feeling strange about paying for something they previously got for free, but they knew that not paying their monthly bill would result in a cut-off of supply by the GOR. One water committee member's brother told us, "We pay because there is no other source of water (...*aur koi paani ki kami hai*)". The GOR set a price range for water with the maximum price at Rs 16 for 40 litres (40 litres being the expected amount villagers would consume daily; Public Health Engineering Department, Rajasthan 2000 (Water Tariff available on line at http://rajwater.gov.in/w_tariff.htm); Project Social Side 1993). Households told us they paid an average of Rs 2-Rs 5 per head, per month. We heard many complaints about the cost of water; villagers participating in the scheme of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) reported using those earnings to pay their portion of monthly bill. A young man acting as payment collector attested that they had trouble getting some households to pay, saying that people would argue about paying and would lie about how many number of cattle they had. In a meeting with a group of 30 men, some of whom were on the village water committee, they told us that people who lived far from a public tap threatened not to pay, but through neighbourhood pressure, they eventually paid. They said, "people try to lie to pay less but we have *angaas* listed".

Payment for water is at the heart of controversies over whether water is a human right or an economic good (Bakker 2007). In terms of gender, the economic condition of water users is a critical consideration since women cannot pay for water with the same ability as men (Zwarteveen 1998). In this Rajasthani case study, I consider the intersection of gender and poverty in terms of who is charged for water *and* who pays for water. On the one

hand, collective payment for girls gives assistance to poor families who have girls. On the other hand, it also means that a poor family with sons and no daughters subsidises wealthy families who have daughters. While girls were discriminated against in terms of payment, there were no further discriminatory subdivisions along caste and class lines. In the following section, I explore further the gendered consequences of water's commodification through feminist political ecology approaches and other gendered critiques of neo-liberal policies.

2 A Feminist Political Ecology Approach to Girls' Non-payment

A feminist political ecology approach takes up political ecology's traditional concerns with the uneven distribution of natural resources, and struggles over access and control, but adds to them a particular concern with gender and other social relationships of unequal power (e.g., caste, class). For example, Lahiri-Dutt (2007; see also Agarwal 1996) notes that access and control of water and land conveys different abilities in decision-making, and she argues in favour of giving women ownership of assets to augment their power and control. The work of feminist political ecologists makes clear that neo-liberal policies and practices depend on gendered divisions of labour and social inequalities in their functioning (Ahlers and Zwartveen 2009; Harris 2008, 2009; Laurie 2007; O'Reilly 2006a). For this reason, I take as a starting point the neo-liberal policy elements informing the Rajasthani project for my investigation of girls' non-payment.

Numerous feminist scholars have explored neo-liberal policies for their implicit gender bias. Ahlers (2002) found that privatisation encourages efficient uses of irrigation water, e.g., high value crops, which override women's access to water resources for other purposes. Gendered inequalities related to resource access are both perpetuated and legitimated by the introduction of market mechanisms, Ahlers (2005) suggested. More extreme, Zwartveen (1998) discovered that neo-liberal policies do not assume that women even use water; they assume that only men do. Harris (2008) used a feminist political ecology approach to investigate a major Turkish irrigation project that led to worsening conditions for women as their income-generating kitchen gardens vanished and they lost control of their labour. Harris' findings gave attention to other characteristics beyond gender (e.g., Arab and Kurdish ethnicity, landholdings, etc) in ways that nuanced an understanding of varied impacts on women's status in the project area. Often empirical data collected for project evaluation does not take social equity into account, so the impacts of neo-liberal policies for gender equity remain unknown (Zwartveen 1998).

Issues of gender equity in the water sector are complicated by neo-liberal water governance policies and participatory approaches (Cleaver and Hamada 2010). Cleaver and Hamada's paper is a much-needed intervention in gender-water literatures that argue uncritically for women's participation in neo-liberal water governance. This omission is potentially a critical failure, because without a detailed interrogation of neo-liberalisation, gender-water debates end up implicitly reinforcing some of the assumptions and naturalisations of neo-liberal policies

(Harris 2009). Specifically, when feminists argue uncritically for the inclusion of women in decentralisation (e.g., move from state to local control), privatisation (e.g., sale of public property to private firms) and marketisation (e.g., prices determined by markets) processes, they often miss that the goals of neo-liberal policies are predicated on existing inequalities (Ahlers and Zwartveen 2009; Harris 2009). This paper seeks to contribute to the debate by suggesting that one outcome of water's commodification and participatory governance is the reinforcement of girls' marginalisation in their natal villages. The forms of neo-liberal water governance I am speaking of here include the decentralisation of water management to the village scale, democratisation in the form of community participation in village water committees and commodification of water that begins with the onset of payment.

When water is considered an economic good not a right, then the prices set by markets, or in this case, by the Government of Rajasthan, need not give attention to the socio-economic condition of users (Bennett et al 2005). Across our interviews we heard stories that villagers paid on behalf of their non-paying (but not always poor) neighbours, saying "We will count it as a good deed (*daan-pun*)". While neo-liberal policies assume an ideal of competitive individualism, i.e., that every individual will make the most of her/his connections and talents in the marketplace (Harvey 2007), the significance of social connections must not be ignored (O'Reilly 2010a). Although often assumed to be antagonistic, within households and communities, gender relationships may be mutually supportive (Rydhagen 2002). Non-market relations are inherent in the functioning of real life as villagers' willingness to support non-paying neighbours proves. Arguably, supporting those who cannot (or do not) pay relates to a collective notion that girls should be supported by the wider village as a good deed. The practice of all households subsidising payment for girls' water suggests a recognition of girls as the responsibility of the wider community until each girl leaves for her *sasuraal*.

As villagers were quite sharp on the issue of water bills, households certainly realised that not charging girls for water meant the overall price per person and head of livestock went up, since the village water bill was then divided by fewer heads. Village size where girls were not charged for water varied from 350-7,500 people, with a mean of 1,360 (n=10). In villages where girls did not pay, most households paid Rs 3-Rs 5 per angaa, with one of 10 villages reporting paying Rs 2. In villages that did charge girls for water, most households paid between Rs 2-Rs 5 per person for water, with four of 43 villages reporting paying Rs 2, and six reporting a range of Rs 2-Rs 5. Whether "girls paid" or not, the price range was roughly the same. Unless a family had an abundance of daughters or was extremely poor, monthly cost-savings were not great.

Neo-liberal water governance has not erased expressions of mutual aid within villages, but as Bakker (2007) and Mansfield (2007) demonstrate, it mixes with earlier institutions and regulations resulting in hybrid forms of neo-liberal and traditional governance. The design of the project with a single water meter for the whole village makes atomisation of the

community more difficult as long as villagers maintain the single water meter and the angaa system, and makes it simple for communities to count or not count girls as water drinkers and household members.

The explanation given by villagers that girls are “not of this house” so they are not charged for water connects social belonging with water consumption. Payment for water was equated with village and household membership, something that was simultaneously assumed and reinforced when boys, married women, and men were counted and paid for water supply. Water’s commodification intersected with notions of girls’ non-membership in their natal households in such a way that girls’ exclusion from payment became a topic discussed by village water committees and villages at large. The works of Page (2005) and O’Reilly (2006a) make plain the commodification of water is a gendered process and I argue further here that it has gendered impacts. Project plans to commodify water and decentralise management meant that each village discussed how payment should be organised, giving the possibility that girls would be discussed in those forums as non-members. Payment was not only intended to empower villagers as customers vis-à-vis the Rajasthan state as provider (O’Reilly and Dhanju under review), but also enabled the further marginalisation of girl children. A possibility of girls claiming a right to water (or its management) at the village scale is taken away from them and their families, when girls are not “customers” in a paid system (Cleaver and Hamada 2010). Furthermore, if the state in a neo-liberal system is expected to respond to the needs of villagers as customers, not as citizens, then girls’ non-payment (i.e., girls are non-customers) hints at a weakening of girls’ citizenship in the eyes of the state.

Agrawal (2005) argued that citizen participation in decentralised conservation management builds environmental subjectivity, i.e., citizens begin to discipline themselves in ways that acquiesce to state goals of conservation, express conservation values and relate new identities. The state creates environmental subjects at a distance who begin to see themselves in new relationships to the natural environment and to each other. Agrawal found that deploying a Foucauldian framework of governmentality in the development of environmental subjects enabled an analysis of social and environmental changes that do not rely on fixed categories, e.g., gender and caste. He claimed that essential categories are not useful predictors of environmental subjectivity and practices, but rather, participation in the regulatory practices of conservation efforts (e.g., enforcement, payment for enforcement and sitting on village level councils) generated new environmental subjectivities. Agrawal’s formulation is useful in the case of the Rajasthan drinking water supply project because it suggests that girls are the most removed from any possibility of a growing environmental subjectivity. By their exclusion from participatory activities from management decisions to water payment, they are the least likely to develop the water conservation awareness and feelings of system ownership that the GOR depends on for sustainability (Project Social Side 2002). The marginalisation of girls suggests they will not develop environmental subjectivities in relation to the new drinking water supply necessary to sustain it. If, as Agrawal

suggests, it takes only a tiny portion of daily experience over time to alter environmental beliefs, then an opportunity is lost in not attempting to affect girls’ relationship to the use and care of drinking water systems. Within the project logic of women as “natural” water workers, such impacts could positively impact drinking water systems over a girls’ lifetime, and across a wider area than that of the project, since girls will carry learned behaviours elsewhere at marriage.

Girls are not wholly removed from the new water supply, since they interact with it as labourers. The incorporation of girls into the new water supply system as unpaid labour reinforces naturalised, gendered divisions of labour (Agarwal 2001). This division of labour was already the standard before the arrival of the new system, so the new system maintains that status quo. What the new system adds, by beginning to charge villagers for water, is an opportunity to reinforce girls’ identities as temporary household workers. I remember a feeling of discomfort whenever villagers expressed that girls were not charged for water in front of girls. Girls did not respond to such remarks verbally and their expressions more often indicated acceptance (i.e., “This is how things work”) than resignation (i.e., “I don’t like it but I can’t change it”). To ask girls how they felt and to expect an honest answer was impossible given that elder relatives were always present, but we should take conversations about girls’ exclusion, while girls listened as an indicator that there was nothing secret or shameful about it. Instead, those conversations emphasise the naturalness of such a decision – and with it, a heteronormative belief continues unquestioned that girls’ lives matter only after an attachment to a man through marriage.

Concealing Social Relations

Project staff left that heteronormative belief unquestioned when they targeted women for women’s participation. Project plans took for granted that it was married women who would be approached in their roles as mothers and homemakers (Cleaver 2001; O’Reilly 2006a). Cleaver (2001) and Wallace and Coles (2005) argue that participatory approaches treat gender as a different kind of technical problem – one that can be solved by the inclusion of women in projects. When gender is rendered technical, the insights of gender theory are lost and women’s participation means “add women and stir” not an analysis of gender relationships and their impact on the opportunities and constraints for both men and women. Too much attention to “women” and not “gender” means that projects focus on what women do, not on men and women in relationship to each other. Agarwal (2001) suggests that separation may sharpen gendered segregation, nor do separate groups seem to impact behaviours in mixed groups. Feminist political ecologists have pointed out that too much focus on women (as a stand-in for gender) hides the social relations – at both household and community scales – in which all users of natural resources are embedded (Ahlers and Zwartveen 2009; Walker and Robinson 2009). Furthermore, as Cleaver (2001) points out, a failure to closely examine water use would suggest that girls should be included in participatory approaches, because they do the work of fetching water. Drawing on these ideas, we must allow that gendered relationships with respect to

drinking water have been impacted through the women's participation component of the project.

Ahlers (2005) has suggested that efficiency has overtaken equity as a chief goal in water supply projects. Women's participation is very often a key to project labour efficiencies and to low-cost ongoing supply maintenance (Wallace and Coles 2005). Community and women's participation ties with neo-liberal water governance directly as way of reducing project costs (Hall and Lobina 2007; O'Reilly and Dhanju under review). The focus on efficiencies through women's participation in the drinking water project begs the question then of how women's participation could be a prime feature, but girls could be marginalised. When their own families recognised the importance of their labour, how/why did project plans overlook the contributions of girls? Agarwal (2001) argues that when participation emerges in a social context in which exclusions remain, particularly those based on gender and caste, then participation will reinforce the exclusion of those who have historically been on the margins. Agarwal was speaking of the rules by which and the forums in which, decisions get made. In the Rajasthan water project's women's participation component, girls were never intended to be included in project decision-making. Women representatives were elected, but a figure of 23% of villages not charging girls for water suggests that women representatives did not argue on behalf of girls' inclusion in the payment system.

Nor should we expect them to. As Kandiyoti argues in 1988, women bargain with patriarchy in ways that may serve them as individuals but have negative repercussions for women as a collective or for the advancement of gendered goals like women's empowerment. A woman representative may think nothing of the implications of girls not paying, but vote along lines of existing social norms. This is not to say that women representatives were powerful voices on village water committees. Representation of women in village water committees usually amounted to tokenism, and decision-making was problematic across the project area. Our research showed that women in general, and especially, lower caste women living on village outskirts, were the least informed about the functioning of the water project and how it was governed. These women seldom knew who village water committee members were, nor did they express an expectation that their gendered interests were represented during village water committee meetings. For girls not counted as water consumers, they could expect even less that their water interests (e.g. water at school for personal hygiene) would be represented. As Singh et al (2008) alert us, the right to water is also imbricated in other rights, like right to education.

Literature on girls in India indicates that girls are particularly vulnerable social members due to work burden, healthcare, access to education and infant mortality (Deolalikar et al 2009). The Rajasthani drinking water project did not intend to further girls' social marginalisation, but as I argue above, did so in a variety of ways. Again, feminist political ecology is helpful here, as this work indicates that a focus on gender relations may hide other important social factors like race, class and age that impact water users' access and control of resources (Ahlers and Zwartveen 2009; Walker and Robinson 2009). After marriage,

women arriving in project villages as daughters-in-law remain on the margins of drinking water supply, as they are least likely to be included in decision-making. Even as grown up women – mothers-in-law with daughters-in-law of their own – they are not household decision-makers and rarely targeted in significant ways. It may be in women's best interests not to participate in drinking water supply operation and maintenance if doing so simply exploits their labour but gives them no greater control (Lahiri-Dutt 2003) or as Cleaver (2001) finds, leads to reduced access to water than before participation. Girls' non-payment, daughters-in-laws' exclusion, married older women's limited roles suggest that the drinking water supply played into the reproduction of gendered inequality at different stages of their lives. Seen in this light, girls' non-payment is not simply a reflection of gender bias in society, but a staging ground for ongoing marginalisation over a lifetime. Put differently, the project unintentionally sidelined women at all life stages.

As Indian population figures show significant disparities in the juvenile sex ratio (Deolalikar et al 2009), not charging for girls' drinking water suggests a new manifestation of gender bias and a potential bright spot. Previously villagers did not pay for water, so with the onset of water's commodification, water payment emerges as another arena in which girls' low status may be expressed. On the other hand, if girls are not charged for drinking water, then they are not an expense to their families. Gender bias resulting in highly-skewed juvenile sex ratios has been linked to expenses associated with girl children (Basu 1999; Deolalikar et al 2009). When they are younger, girls' mortality is higher, with data suggesting that this might be due to families' reluctance to pay for girls' medical care (Deolalikar et al 2009). The prospect of a young woman's expensive dowry leads families to develop a strong non-preference for girls, which may translate into altering sex ratios before birth through the use of ultrasound (Basu 1999). Studies that link costs associated with girls and girl children's survival suggest that villages that opt not to charge girls for water might increase girls' survival rates in those villages, as the cost of water they drink is not borne by their own household, but is instead subsidised by the community at large.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have suggested that village-scale social norms and the introduction of neo-liberal water governance in the project area combined to diminish the status of girls in some project villages. Taking a feminist political ecology approach, I have discussed how the introduction of neo-liberal governance successfully overcame a social norm that water should be provided free-of-cost by the GOR (O'Reilly and Dhanju under review). The project intended to make people pay for water, but it resulted in an uneven landscape where in certain villages, everyone but girls paid. Prior beliefs about girls' belonging and non-belonging led communities to consider that girls should not pay, and I have suggested that project goals of decentralisation, democratisation and commodification enabled such a decision to be taken. Once taken, a decision that girls should not be charged for water became daily practice, thereby strengthening

belief's about the girls' lack of community ties before marriage. By decentralising operation and maintenance to the village scale, by democratising village scale decision-making through community and women's participation, the project introduced an opportunity for the stabilisation of gendered inequalities in a new sphere (Agarwal 2001). Girls may labour, they may drink water, but "they are not of this house", and therefore, were rendered invisible as village citizens. These findings concur with Agarwal's (2001) that gendered participation is in part based on existing rules and norms that work to exclude women before any intervention begins. This paper contributes to conversations on social changes and environmental subjectivity as they are influenced by neo-liberal governance.

I have argued that a decision to leave girls out of water payment gives complex social results. Girls are not recognised as village citizens or family members, with additional potential discrimination in the areas of education and work burden. Their bargaining power in relation to the state, community and family has been altered downward (Agarwal 2001). Girls' mortality rates might go down if the cost of raising girls goes down, but Basu (1999) shows that low status of girls in society compounds families' non-preference for girls. Girls' drinking water is subsidised

by the village at large, meaning that neo-liberal water policies' focus on individual capacity rather than collective action has not erased acts of mutual assistance (Harris 2009; O'Reilly 2010a) and perhaps eased the cost of raising girls for poor families. However, cost-sharing of girls' drinking water may also be viewed as a financial burden communities are willing to bear to maintain notions of girls' subordinate status. Community cohesion surrounding bill payment is, in part, built on girls' exclusion.

Women's participation activities in the pre-project phase both encouraged and reinforced existing ideals about women and girls in ways that increased girls' subordinate status as village and household members. As a set of strictly technical interventions, women's participation activities could not have affected a significant change in gender relations – they were imagined within, and took advantage of, gender-biased community norms about women's labour and unequal power, including unequal power among women by age (Agarwal 2001; Cleaver 2001; O'Reilly 2006a). That all villages did not engage in girls' non-payment dispels myths of homogeneity across villages that were present in project plans. Feminist political ecologists approach with caution policies and scholarship that imply that the benefits of a development intervention are uniform for all. Without investigating control and access of

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resources as influenced by multiple characteristics, not only do we fail to learn how different men and different women are affected, but as this research demonstrates, how age is a significant factor in gendered discrimination around water supply.

Rights sometimes appear opposed to culture, or can be contextualised as a part of or a parallel of culture (Singh et al 2008). We do not have evidence that non-payment led to girls' discrimination in access to drinking water, or vice versa, that community sharing of girls' portion of the bill made drinking water more accessible to them. While a right to water is recognised at a global scale, especially for children, this paper contributes to studies following the translation of global rights to the local level. The research shows that perceptions of children, with an important attention to gender bias in the Rajasthani context, affect the rights associated with water for girls in individual communities. Furthermore, the analysis above suggests that management institutions (e.g. rules and norms) for water simultaneously reflect and reproduce perceptions of children's belonging in individual communities. I am arguing that the key issue when neo-liberal governance met gendered participatory approaches in the implementation phase of the project was not about access to water, but about what access to water meant in terms of girls' membership and associated rights. International and state policies may see children as full blown citizens, but that is not to say that this holds true at the village scale (Singh et al 2008), and as I have

shown, the category "children" must be disaggregated to reveal how girls and boys are differently affected. As Agarwal (2001) made plain, rights and abilities of individuals to negotiate vary with scale from the household to the state, and social norms are constituted in all three arenas.

The current paper addresses a gap in political ecology literatures with respect to the gender dimensions of neo-liberalisation processes in the water sector by suggesting a variety of impacts when girls' are excluded from water payment. Wallace and Coles (2005) remind us that we must think in terms of gender relations, and the ideas and practices that support relationships of inequality. This paper contributes by highlighting how a village community works together at the onset of neo-liberal changes to perpetuate gender bias in water and citizenship. The research suggests that future interventions might recognise discussions of water payment as the time-space where and when communities might purposefully consider girls and the implications of their decisions on girls' well-being (O'Reilly 2007). Additionally, if costs of water rise in the future, as they are expected to do (O'Reilly and Dhanju under review), then there is the potential for villagers to revisit the issue of girls' non-payment. Villagers already complain about water's cost, suggesting that they might refuse in the future to subsidise girls' drinking water and shift that burden onto girls' families. Collectively villages reinforce girls' marginalisation; collectively they could work to end it.

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