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Revisiting and Resharing the Idea of an Integrated Justice Approach to Land Reform

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The concept of an integrated justice approach to land reform aims to understand better and address agrarian concerns, particularly where gender justice is often overlooked by key actors, including the state, social movements, and even feminist organisations, in the context of land reform. This approach was developed by building on Fraser's three-dimensional justice approach (1999, 2005). The concept was first introduced in my PhD manuscript (Bejeno 2021) and later developed in a working paper published by the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in October 2021 (Bejeno 2021).

Nearly four years later, I believe it is essential to revisit and expand on the idea, aiming to share it with a broader audience and sparking further conversation around the persistent issue of land injustice in the Philippines—and potentially beyond. This study examines the enduring problem of unjust land (re)distribution through two case studies in the Philippines. The core argument is that land injustices rooted in class and gender are deeply intertwined and shaped by economic maldistribution, cultural misrecognition, and political misrepresentation. As such, any meaningful response to the land reform question must integrate these three dimensions—economic, cultural, and political, or referred to here as the “integrated justice approach to land reform.”

This framework is especially relevant in the Philippine context, and possibly elsewhere, where agrarian structures remain marked by landlord violence, weak political will among reform implementers, and deeply entrenched gender norms. Addressing these challenges requires not just policy reform but a rethinking of justice itself.

Concept of Justice, Gender Justice, and an Integrated Justice Approach

First, it is important to understand the basic concepts used here. The concept of (in)justice is defined as economic (mal)distribution, cultural (mis)recognition, and political (mis)representation. These injustices are shaped by agrarian structures, cultural structures (like patriarchy), and political subordination, which limit people's equal participation, particularly women's, leading to injustice. In the context of land reform and peasant struggles, justice is often a foundational demand; yet, its various dimensions are frequently overlooked, rendering gender (in)justice negligible.

Gender justice in this context means that peasant women (not solely men, as is often the case) are recognised with their right to own land independently or as co-owners with their husbands or partners in any agrarian land redistribution. This pertains to power relations, specifically between male and female peasants, with the ultimate goal of transforming it to advance gender equality and social justice in general. A just society, as conceptualised by Fraser (1999, 2005), means that people, including men and women, have equitable resources, standing, and voice. Thus, to overcome injustice means eliminating institutionalised barriers that hinder “parity of participation” in societal interactions among social classes and status orders. Fraser (2005) suggests that through parity of participation, people share in, partake of, and contribute to society by having access to the resources necessary to take an active and equal part in social interactions with others, enjoy equal social status among others, and have equal access to political decision-making. Hence, emancipation can only exist based on equal participation in all spheres of life. Consequently, I argue that pursuing gender justice on land necessitates an integrated approach that combines three spheres of land justice: economic distribution, cultural recognition, and political representation. The economic sphere

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of justice centres on the redistribution of resources, where class structure is the primary barrier. This aligns with the Marxian understanding of class as an economic relation between capitalists and the proletariat, focusing on exploitation and domination. In agrarian studies, this notion reveals a direct relationship between landlessness and the poverty and injustice experienced by peasants, as well as the domination and violence perpetrated by landowners. Feminist scholars linked women's landlessness to a lack of land redistribution and non-recognition of women's equal land rights. (see, for example, Agarwal 1994, Deere and Leon, 2001, Jacobs, 2013, Doss et.al, 2014, Alano 2015, Kieran et.al 2015, Levien, 2017, Morgan 2017, and Bejeno 2021).

The cultural sphere focuses on the recognition of status order, with gender relations (among other social status orders) being the main barrier. Gender injustice is produced and reproduced through patriarchy, the "institutional all-encompassing power that men have as a group over women, the systematic devaluation of all the roles and traits which the society has assigned to women" (Popkin, A., 1979). This power imbalance shapes societal practices, norms, and public policies, thereby perpetuating gender-based injustices, including land injustice. And the political sphere centers on the representation of people's voices and standing, with political structure serving as the primary barrier. Political misrepresentation, particularly in policymaking within people's organisations or state agencies, can jeopardise the advancement of marginalised or subordinated groups, including women. Therefore, the integrated justice approach simultaneously scrutinises and intervenes in economic redistribution, cultural recognition, and political representation, especially if the goal is gender justice on land.

Gender-Based Land Injustice in the Philippines and Elsewhere

Gender injustice on land is a persistent global issue. In the Philippines, for instance, female agrarian registered beneficiaries are less than half the number of men (Bejeno, 2021). Studies in other developing countries similarly show low female land ownership, with women owning as little as 11% in Brazil, 5% in Kenya, and three times less than men in Ghana (World Bank, 2012). In Asia, even where data is available such as in Vietnam, women are registered at only half the rate of men (Kieran et.al, 2015).

The persistent inequality in women's land rights across the world is attributed to various factors, including: discriminatory laws and policies that directly impede women's land rights; women's ignorance of their land rights; male bias and dominance within administrative, judicial, and other decision-making bodies; land distribution often being directed towards male household heads; strong opposition from men to women's land rights, coupled with a lack of assertion from women themselves; and historical premium placed on men in land redistribution processes and the underlying gender structure contribute to women's reduced access to and control over land.

For example, in South Asia, few women own land due to strong opposition from men, social constructions of gender roles, low female education levels, and male dominance in decision-making bodies (Agarwal, 1994). In Latin America, gender equality in land ownership is constrained by women's limited awareness of joint or direct ownership and the direct targeting of men or men's associations in land titling programs, as observed in Peru, Honduras, and Mexico (Deere and Leon, 2001). Jacobs' study (2013) of 32 cases in Africa, Asia, and Latin America found that the direct targeting of household heads (i.e., men) in land redistribution persists. Similarly, men are often targeted as beneficiaries of compensation for land dispossession and in rehabilitation/resettlement programs in parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe (Levien, 2017). This direct targeting of men as land beneficiaries is also prevalent in Indonesia and the Philippines (Morgan, 2017; Bejeno, 2021; Leonard et.al, 2015; Alano, 2015). These patriarchal norms, practices, and policies profoundly impact women's participation in decision-making within and outside the household, their reproductive health choices, mobility, bargaining power, and children's welfare.

Moreover, secure access to land and tenure is crucial for the economic empowerment and social bargaining power of rural women, as land entitlement is often a prerequisite for accessing other productive resources and social inclusion. Without land titles, women often lack the necessary collateral for credit. They are denied access to essential inputs (like high-quality seeds and fertilisers), farming equipment, and extension services, which are critical for improving productivity (World Bank, 2012; Agarwal, 1994; Deere and Leon, 2001; Leonard et.al, 2015; Bejeno, 2021).

The significant gender disparities in access to inputs and asset ownership lead to a gender productivity gap. Studies

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suggest that providing women with the same access to productive resources as men could increase farm yields by 20-30% (or increase agricultural output by 2.5-4% in developing countries), potentially reducing world hunger by 12-17% (ADB, 2017 cited from FAO, 2010). Beyond economic benefits, women's ownership of at least 25% of household assets is linked to increased decision-making power within the household, including reproductive health decisions (ADB, 2013 cited from Beegle, Frankenberger, and Thomas, 2001). Land ownership also significantly reduces violence against women, as property can enable women to escape marital violence (ADB, 2013 cited from Agarwal and Panda, 2007; Friedemann-Sánchez, 2006; ICRW, 2006). It enhances women's mobility, decisions on employment, health, independent use of money, and positively impacts children's nutritional welfare (ADB, 2013 cited from Swaminathan, Lahoti, and Suchitra, 2012; Doss, 2005). On the contrary, countries where women lack the right to own land tend to have an average of 60% more malnourished children compared to those where women have some or equal access to credit and land (OECD, 2010).

Despite the crucial role of women's equal land entitlement, gender-based land injustice persists, largely rooted in women's subordinate position within the household. This subordination is reinforced by the higher regard given to production (often equated with men) versus reproduction (equated with women). This division often leads to the male household head being the primary target beneficiary of land redistribution programs, as seen in Latin America (Deere and Leon, 2001), South Asia (Agarwal, 1994), Asia (Kieran et.al), and the Philippines (Bejeno, 2021; Leonard et.al, 2015; Alano, 2015; Borrás, 2007). Furthermore, the disproportionate allocation of time for care and housework to women, regardless of income, impacts their access to land and income (ADB, 2013). In many societies, women's labour and contributions to production are undervalued or even devalued, with reproductive work often equated to 'unemployment' (Bejeno, 2021). Consequently, men are considered the primary farmworkers and household heads and thus remain the main beneficiaries of land reform (Bejeno, 2021; Leonard et al., 2015).

While efforts are ongoing in several countries, such as the Philippines, where the CARPER law and other legislation provide for women's individual or co-ownership land entitlement, progress is slow due to those underlying assumptions, especially regarding the household and the household head as the basis for identifying beneficiaries in land redistribution (Bejeno, 2021). In many instances, even when women are listed as independent household heads or beneficiaries, their land access may still be determined by patriarchal households, and they often retain fewer rights than men despite joint ownership (Walker, 2003; Doss et.al, 2014). Inheritance laws, for example, in sub-Saharan Africa, often prevent widows from inheriting from their husbands (Doss et.al, 2014). In summary, gender relations have a significant impact on women's control of assets, access to land, ownership, decision-making power within households (including reproductive rights), communities, mobility, and children's welfare.

Land Injustice and the Underlying Gendered Agrarian Structure

Landlessness or limited access to and control over land is a fundamental cause of injustice and poverty in many cases. In the Philippines, for example, studies indicate that limited land access, alongside social services, is a key driver of poverty and inequality, while access to land is a determinant of rural welfare (ADB, 2007; Quisumbing et.al, 2004; Balisacan, 2007). The concentration of land among the elite correlates highly with poverty among landless peasants and farmworkers. Despite over 30 years of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) in the Philippines, landlessness remains. In 2012, approximately 800,000 hectares remained to be redistributed, and strong opposition from landowners often led to violence and even deaths of peasants (Bejeno, 2021).

Moreover, while significant progress has been made in advancing gender justice, largely driven by the strong role of feminist activism and scholarship, social movements have often prioritised class or resource redistribution concerns, which has consequently stunted the advancement of gender justice (Bejeno, 2021). In many instances, the gender agenda is perceived as 'divisive' (Agarwal, 1994; Deere and Leon, 2001), despite women's active and often frontline roles in these movements (Bejeno, 2021). Rural social movements globally, including those in Brazil, the Philippines, Central America, India, and China, typically emphasize redistributive land reform and class concerns in their agrarian reform campaigns (Deere and Leon, 2003; Agarwal, 1994). As a result, the advancement of both land redistribution and the recognition of women's land rights often remains marginal or absent from the agendas and political strategies of social movements.

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Overall, class and gender-based land injustices are fundamentally caused by class hierarchy (economic maldistribution) and gender structure and politics that do not uphold gender equality. These systems perpetuate economic, cultural, and political injustices, which in turn influence public policies and political representation, reinforcing and reproducing gender-based injustices, particularly concerning land. Thus, land injustice can be better understood and addressed by considering the interlinkages of economic, cultural, and political dimensions or an integrated justice approach. As Fraser (1999, 2005) had highlighted, injustice is produced by economic maldistribution, cultural misrecognition, and political misrepresentation. Thus, it should be understood and addressed through corresponding interventions: economic redistribution, cultural recognition, and political representation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, land justice is fundamentally a matter of social justice. Both theoretical insights and empirical evidence demonstrate that class and gender-based land injustices are primarily caused by agrarian and gender structures, which are often not adequately integrated into political actions. This perpetuates economic maldistribution, cultural misrecognition, and political misrepresentation. To effectively understand and address persistent land injustice, the paper identifies several key challenges that require attention. First, an integrated approach to justice is more helpful in analysing and discussing agrarian or land reform matters. Second, social movements and theorists must simultaneously consider examining all three dimensions of injustices: economic (mal)distribution, cultural (mis)recognition, and political (mis)representation. This reinforces the crucial point that “there is no justice without gender justice”. Third, movements (social/women) should broaden alliances and utilise multiple strategies to challenge the agrarian structure and patriarchal system within institutions, including state agencies, civil society organisations, and society in general. Ultimately, integrating economic, cultural, and political dimensions in research, policy, and practice can be more effective in advancing land and gender justice.

Overall, transforming gender injustice on land necessitates challenging at least three existing power structures: the ideologies that justify and sustain gender inequality (beliefs, attitudes, and practices that uphold social hierarchies); the distribution and control of resources (material, financial, human, and intellectual); and the institutions and systems that reproduce unequal power relations (family, community, market, education, law, and state, among others).

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Dr. Cynthia Embido Bejeno earned her PhD with the dissertation *On the Frontlines: Peasant Women and the Land Reform Struggles in the Philippines*. Her research examines women's land rights and their struggles in agrarian reform, highlighting both the opportunities and constraints in peasant women's justice claims. She contributes to critical debates on social movements, gender, and agrarian studies.