

The role of women in the history of energy transitions

Department: Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development

Research group: Environmental Governance

Supervisor: Diana Vela-Almeida

Email address: d.r.velaalmeida@uu.nl

Project description

Today's energy transition has been called upon not only to be urgent but also just. The call for a just transition originated from labor movements demanding responsible solutions to communities' social and environmental struggles, particularly for workers with high stakes in greenhouse-gas-intensive sectors. These workers seek secure job opportunities in low-carbon industries while addressing the urgent need to combat climate change. Yet, climate initiatives still place insufficient attention to the intertwined nature of labor regimes, their gender-based impacts and the social reproduction that has sustained labor regimes in industries connected to the energy transition. This study aims to examine the role of women's labor connected to different examples of energy transition in history.

For example, during the energy transition that led to the Industrial Revolution, increased productivity and economic growth failed to dismantle poverty and inequality. The gender division of labor intensified as capitalism expanded, men occupied paid labor spaces outside the household and women took on the reproductive labor and unpaid household labor, reinforcing gender inequalities. The same was the case for the discovery of oil in 1859, which marked a turning point for energy-fueled development responsible for dirty energy expansion worldwide, fueling among others gender violence connected to the climate crisis.

These energy developments in history have often led to the exploitation of both human labor and nature. As the current energy transition is hailed as a win-win solution against dirty economic systems, a crucial question arises: how different is this energy transition from previous systems of labor exploitation, gender social stratification, and harmful practices of the past?

This is an exploratory research question that will lead to a literature review of the history of energy transitions in connection with feminist struggles and women labor. This search will be answered by conducting a systematic literature review with the following activities:

1. Search all literature using SCOPUS and Web of Science databases to cover feminist studies, gender and diversity, labor geographies, in connection to historical forms of energy transition.
2. These sources and coding will be defined between the supervisor and the student to ensure inter-code reliability using a free systematic review platform <https://sysrev.com/>.
3. Identify overarching themes concepts connected to studies of the energy transitions in history.
4. Determine which type of evidence has emerged in the literature and which theoretical gaps exist.

Report results in a paper of 5000 words that explains methods, analysis and conclusions.

Job requirements

- Candidates should have a social science background. Higher priority will be given to candidates with experience in political ecology, political economy, economic geography, feminist economics, or gender studies.
- Candidates should have some experience conducting literature review and be familiar with literature search in SCOPUS and Web of Science.
- Candidates should be familiar with software for qualitative analysis (e.g. NVivo, RQDA, AtlasTi).