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Articles and Statements

Rethinking Cultural Ecofeminism in the Commercial Transport and Storage System in Ghana: A Critique of "Women Moving the City" and "Women Moving Trucks" Projects

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the motivations behind two projects, "Women Moving the City" and "Women Moving Trucks" in the commercial transport industry of Ghana under the purview of the cultural ecofeminist. Evidently, the industry is mainly dominated by men however, the disproportionate representation of women, poor regulatory arrangements and questionable driving attitude of male drivers have led to high rates of accidents. The projects, which recruited and trained only females to drive buses and heavy-duty trucks in Accra and Takoradi underscored certain essential attributes that consider the female drivers over their male colleagues because of certain essential but intimate associations they possess. Accordingly, the goal of mainstreaming a proportionate representation of females in the commercial transport and logistics industries as well as encouraging male drivers to adopt a more 'feminine' driving style has been accorded with priority. The paper reviews that the ideology of essentializing women driving style over men can weaken the mainstreaming goal of the projects in the future. Relevance on raising awareness, building self-confidence and expanding choices, increasing people's access to and control over resources in the commercial transport industry should be prioritized.

Keywords: commercial transport industry, ecofeminism, gender equality, gender mainstreaming, women moving the city, women moving trucks.

1. Introduction

Our understanding of the African society, dominantly from the works of sociologists and ethnographers, has seen a far-reaching revision over the past few decades. Contrary to some changing facets of its social institutions, other sub-structural components have not still welcomed a close intertwining of the feminist reassessment of conventional knowledge (Bozzoli, 1983: 139). Denigrated social and cultural norms have assumed deep-rooted superficial roles and perceptions of women. Consequently, alienation and exploitation have become the concealed conventional system within the gendered fabric of the larger social structure. An aspect of the formidable challenge of gender ordering is identified in men's "commodification" of women and resources and women's acceptance of their "commoditized" status within the institutional settings. On this account, the struggle to deconstruct and reconstruct the hierarchical social relations and the trichotomy between gender, nature and the environment is to this point a challenging task

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(Gottschlich et al., 2017: xx) in Africa (Lemos, 2011: 204) and other parts of the Asia (Großmann et al., 2017: 12; Elmhirst et at., 2017: 8).

One aspect of the economic institution in the social structure, the commercial transport sector has not made significant strides in the call for gender mainstreaming in Africa (Duchène, 2011: 14; SATAWU, 2011). The industry drives on two significant dimensions, access and mobility (Gbadamosi, 2010: 1); and since the dimensions are considered as the preconditions for successful economic development, prioritizing gender-related considerations in this industry can be a significant way of improving development effectiveness, sustainability and reducing gender discrimination (CIDA, 1999: 7, 10). Across the African region, women have made remarkable records in attaining legislative positions and also played a distinguished role in the economic sector development (AUC and UNOHCHR, 2017: 11, 40). On the contrary, women's involvement in the commercial transport industry is still lagging behind. Several attempts have been made to break the gender barriers bedeviling the industry yet the initiatives have not yielded substantial effect. In Congo-Kinshasa for instance, the state-owned bus company known as, City Train; trained and hired women as ticket inspectors and drivers. At the end of the training, only one woman successfully qualified to drive with five others as ticket inspectors (Duchène, 2011: 14). In Mali, the National Employment Agency (ANPE) and the Regional Bank for Solidarity (BRS) initiated an Urban Taxi Project that aimed to help Twenty-seven (27) women to break through the glass ceiling of the male-dominated taxi industry. In spite of the aim of the project, it was marred by the failure of the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family to respond to sponsorship requests. In all, only two women had access to taxis from the project (ibid. p. 14, 15).

Ghana has also not been immune to the stagnated growth of gender mainstreaming in its commercial transport landscape. Apparently, it should not be a surprise for many Ghanaians to think that a baby carriage is female-associated whereas a bus or a heavy-duty truck is male-driven. The transport industry and specifically amongst the bus and heavy-duty companies is a onedimensional, male-dominated industry (Moss et al., 2018; 2). Although there are constitutional provisions and laws that enshrine equality and rights for women, however, the gendered dimensions of economic disparity in the commercial transport sector remain vigorous. Statistically, nearly 8 % of men in Ghana work in the transport and storage sector with women representing only 0.3 % (Ladybird Logistics Limited, 2019). Considering the existing distribution of transports and fuel logistics companies, there is not a convincing resonation of seriousness to engender gender equality. The lack of commitment on the part of the individuals, government and companies could emerge as a result of the longstanding institutional settings and systems (norms, traditions, laws, etc.) that latently play crucial roles within the various institutions and our everyday practices (Techane, 2017: 334). In response to the irregularities, few companies are employing female drivers to be at the front-seat of driving in order to reduce the gender gap in Ghana. Two companies are but not limited to the Greater Accra Passenger Transport Executive (GAPTE) and the Ladybird Logistic Ghana Limited. The research focuses on the gender considerations of the two projects of the above-mentioned companies. The projects under review are new phenomena that have not received much attention within the academic and research domain of influence.

2. Theoretical Review: Ecofeminism

Theoretically, ecofeminism highlights the fundamental assumption of equality between genders through the revaluation of non-patriarchal structures and the comprehensive assessment of the world that recognizes organic processes (Miles, 2007: 504). The ecofeminist maintains that this institutionalized arrangement is the explicit occurrence of hierarchical structure that allocates power and dominance to men at the detriment of the women and nature. Thus, women and nature were repeatedly described as "chaotic, irrational, and in need of control", whereas men were commonly considered "rational, ordered" and therefore endowed with the capacity to control and use women and nature for their own gain (ibid. p. 505). Since the domination over women and nature have concurrently occurred, women, therefore, have a specific stake in ending the dominance over both (Pande, 2003: 7). They are of the view that in order to deal with the long-standing construct, it is necessary to reverse the status ascription of both – women and nature (Bauhardt, 2013: 365). A subdomain of this movement, cultural ecofeminism, draws on the assumption that there is a close relationship between women and the environment and for that matter, their intimate associations allow them to be more sensitive to the sanctity and degradation

of the environment. Psychologically, women are endowed with greater emotional tendencies that have greater ties to nature than men who are seen as more rational and objective with a greater tendency for abstract thinking. It is important for society to place a keen interest in this sensitive aspect of the associations insofar as it presents a more direct connection of the physical world in which human beings and other creatures must live together.

3. Methods

The research conceptualizes a method of reasoning that is essentially deductive for the purpose of analyzing the two projects. The research aims to discuss the extent to which the fundamental conception of ecofeminism can be assimilated within the motivations of the "Women Moving the City" and "Women Moving Trucks" projects in Ghana. Consequently, the study gives a comprehensive understanding of the ideological pursuit from both projects that either show satisfactory implications or otherwise for future considerations and prospects. By using descriptive and explanatory approaches to collect and analyze data, the research mainly uses secondary literature but for the paucity of gender-related-transport studies in Ghana, other helpful non-academic sources relevant to the research were also considered. Online searches using keywords such as "ecofeminism, gender equality and mainstreaming, Women Moving the City, Women Moving Trucks, Commercial Transport Industry" etc. were conducted.

4. The Commercial Transport System in Ghana

The commercial transport landscape is strongly dominated by men, a service that is almost entirely and for many years provided by self-organized small scale para-transit private operators (Kwesi et al., 2018: 1). It serves about 95 % of the public transport needs, often through shared taxis and minibuses that are popularly known as "Trotro" (Fouracre et al., 1994; IBIS, 2005). In the effort to improve public transport in Ghana, particularly in Accra and Kumasi (two of the major cities in Ghana), the Government of Ghana in collaboration with the French Development Agency, the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank initiated the Ghana Urban Transport Project (GUTP). The Project earmarked the implementation of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT-Metro Mass Transport) system in 2005 (Okoye et al., 2010: 11). Despite the advent of GUPT and the influx of other private bus companies (VIP, Royal VVIP, DIPLOMAT, etc.), the industry is bedeviled with the disproportionate representation of women, poor regulatory arrangements and questionable driving attitude leading to high rates of accidents (Moss et al., 2018: 1). The facilitators and stakeholders, therefore, initiated the two projects as a response to curbing these irregularities.

Women Moving the City" and "Women Moving Trucks" Projects

The two cases are joint-projects sponsored by the Swedish manufacturer SCANIA Group with support from Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and some departments under the Ghana Government (the Driver Vehicle License Authority [DVLA], Ministry of Transport, and the Ghana Armed Forces). The projects although share similarities, they are operated by different companies. The "Women Moving the City" project is engaged by the Greater Accra Passenger Transport Executive (GAPTE), a public-private partnership bus company in Accra. Independent of the project the GAPTE also employs male drivers who in fact constitute a larger percentage of their driver population. On the other hand, the project "Women Moving Trucks", is managed by Ladybird Logistics Ghana Limited, a private fuel logistics company in Takoradi of the Western region of Ghana. Ladybird Logistics company recruits only female truckers. The similarities between the projects are observed in their sponsorship agencies, all-female recruitment setting, gender mainstreaming and women empowerment agenda. They are different considering their location, cooperative arrangement, companies' resources and vehicular operations.

In the bid to alleviate the gender bias, the stakeholders of both projects in 2017 launched a special cooperative project dubbed "Women Moving the City" to mobilize women who were interested to become professional bus drivers and were also prepared to join a 6-month mandatory, cost-free training course. The aim of the campaign was to boost the number of women drivers in the city's public transport system. According to a documentary report published by SCANIA, between 2017 and 2019 alone, 52 women had received training to become bus drivers in the capital, Accra. In a statement by the Managing Director of SCANIA West Africa, Fredrik

Morsing, he said "SCANIA already has a big presence in Accra. The Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system has been working for several years, and the city is ready to take on female drivers...We hope that this initiative will not only be an opportunity to start a new career but that it will also be a challenge to the existing drivers to improve their performance" (SCANIA Group, 2018). At the moment, apart from the Women Moving the City project known to mainstream gender in the Ghanaian commercial transport industry, the other two include Women Moving Trucks and Miss Taxi Ghana.

The Ladybird Logistics Ghana Limited is a newly established freight company that began operations in 2018. The company operates in Takoradi, a city in western Ghana and only employs female heavy-duty truck drivers. As part of its core mission, the company is bent on excellence and professionalism in the logistics industry with an emphasis on empowering women. For this reason, it is playing a key role in the project "Women Moving Trucks" and has 21 trained drivers and 12 trucks (CNN, 2019). The Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Ms. Payin Marfo, is a certified project management professional who had no experience in the trucking and logistics industry (Cox, 2019). With the vision to establish the first all-female fuel logistics company, Ms. Marfo scouted for female bus drivers in Accra, who had already been trained [through the Women Moving the City Project] but were ready to make a switch to drive trucks. According to Cox, Ms. Marfo is reported as saying "[t]he idea of driving trucks appealed to most of them and they were willing to make the Ladybird dream a reality...I knew next to nothing about trucks or the logistics industry...I [also] have a passion for empowering women. This opportunity appealed to me purely because the idea was radical and challenging." The company and SCANIA with the assistance of other private and public entities, organizations and individuals including the Ghana Armed Forces Mechanical Transport Academy, the West Africa Training Academy and the Zen Petroleum team, trained the prospective drivers on the complex theoretical and practical facets of trucking and fuel haulage (Ladybird Logistics, 2019). Inclusive of the training were fuel truck driving and maintenance, physical training, safety driving and ethical standards inculcation (SCANIA Group, 2018). After the training, the female truckers' main tasks were to transport and haul fuel to mining and construction companies. Truck driving and fuel haulage were characteristically a new experience for the company and the entire team.

5. Findings and Discussion

The rationale for the "Women Moving the City" project reveals a substantial connection with the fundamental conception of cultural ecofeminism. According to Moss, Powitz & Michaelsen (Moss et al., 2018: 3), two fundamental reasons for the project underpin the mainstreaming of women to drive commercial buses in Ghana. The first being that women are better drivers than men because of their less aggression behind the wheels. It is believed that women drive more carefully than men which virtually translate into less wear on the vehicles and better fuel efficiency. This implies that on average, the buses do not spend much time in the workshop as well as less maintenance and repair costs. On the other hand, they spend more time on the road transporting passengers as well as generating income and consuming less fuel. Secondly, women are better drivers than men because of their less susceptibility to accidents. A plethora of studies supports these findings (Evans, 1991; Lancaster, Ward, 2002; Waylen, McKenna, 2002; Abel-Aty, As-Saidi, 2000; McKenna et al., 1998). These studies predicate their findings on females' minimal aggressive and protective nature often compared to males who drive faster, violate more traffic regulations (together with alcohol limits), more likely to have trivial regards for safety interventions (such as alcohol interlocks, safety belts), and the tendency to lose vehicle control. According to Shinar (Shinar, 2007: 349), "[g]ender is a great divide among drivers in their driving style, driving violations, and crash involvement... In general, men are more likely to exhibit overt aggressive behaviours than women... [and] this difference extends to the world of driving." In addition to the reactionary differences, the project appreciates the effect of engaging female drivers to extend beyond fuel, life and spare-parts savings. It perceives that the female bus drivers would serve as role-models from whom their male colleagues can learn. This is possible because the fleet of buses is equipped with a modern GPS tracker device that would help retrieve extensive real-time data about individual driving profiles. Since data from the female drivers may reveal their minimal accident records, good buses condition as well as more profits; the male colleagues, in spite of their majority, will "adopt a more 'feminine' driving style with the effect of significant cost reduction"

(Moss et al., 2018: 3). The project, "Women Moving the City", with these reasons would not only reduce the gender gaps but also deconstruct the gender associations in the commercial transport industry. The initiative could open a wider opportunity for women to participate and harness the large scale para-transit segment of the transport economy. At the moment, there is apparently a microscopic number of women who operate within the minivans sector popularly called *Trotro* (Sarfo, 2016), most of whom show up as ticket-attendants.

Ortner (Ortner, 1974: 77) maintains that women have a dominant endowment of emotional tendencies that allow them to have greater ties to nature. This association could also account for their minimal aggression during the driving process. It is therefore not surprising that the enormity of value that arises from women's empowerment in the commercial transport industry is huge. When they are involved in equal activities and opportunities with men, they save the environment, life and improve living conditions of others whereas the reverse, destruction and losses, are to some extent the case for male drivers. In the video documentary by SCANIA (2018), one of the trainees' mother, Ms. Rebecca Amandi is quoted as saying "anytime she [Charlotte, the bus driver] has money, she brings it home for us to help to feed her siblings. So she's really helping." This strengthens the ideological assertion of women's close association to nature in the improvement of human lives and cares for the environment. In the same documentary, the Managing director of GAPTE, Mr. Samson Guyamera said that "[w]omen are much more careful drivers than men, and we want to introduce an element of competition in our driver corps. So with the women competing with the men in the arrangement, we aim to get the best out of our driver arrangements to bring out the quality in the public transport arrangements we have in Accra."

The Ladybird Logistics Company and their employment of all-females are also redefining the road and the logistics industry. In the documentary, the CEO of Ladybird Logistics, Ms. Payin Marfo is also quoted as saying "Currently in Ghana, we've got a gap within the trucking industry. It's predominantly men – actually, it's a male-dominated industry. And we have a lot of females who are confident and who are good drivers but they don't consider trucking as a profession. And I believe that if we give them the opportunity, they will be very good truck drivers." Through their operations, there has been a remarkable achievement of curtailing the problem of fuel theft in the industry. It reveals having had 75,000km of fuel transportation without Lost Time Injury (LTI) as well as zero rollovers and spill of products since its establishment (Ladybird Logistics, 2019). The activities of the company have also attracted the attention of international media. In 2019, CNN Africa and AFP News contacted the company because of the positive report the agency received (CNN, 2019). It is reported that the carrier had extremely reduced the amount of fuel theft in Ghana that estimates about half a million dollars (US \$ 500,000) of losses a year. This endemic problem has necessitated a solution-based approach but after fuel transport and haulage consignments were allocated to the Ladybird Company, the problem has been solved. Ms. Marfo thinks that the absence of fuel theft is because [t]he female drivers are more cautious and that it could also be an intrinsic qualities females possess over males. She argues that "maybe it is a female thing because we are always thinking about the children we have at home and making sure that you don't want to take certain risks" (AFP, 2019), reiterating the fundamental groundings of cultural ecofeminism in her submission. The CEO of Zen Petroleum, Mr. Tewiah also stated that "[i]t's still early days but the results have been absolutely amazing and very humbling...losses are non-existent" confirming the positive impact the female truckers have had on the entire fuel industry. An important pointer to this accomplishment could be the outgrowth of the training quality and work ethics inculcated to the ladies. According to Ms. Marfo "what we've managed to instill in the ladies that we've employed through the training process are three values: one of professionalism, integrity, and the last is teamwork. Whatever you do impact everybody within the team" (CNN, 2019). The central awareness is that once females stand on equal grounds with males, they have the capacity to do and even more what may have been socially constructed as incapable or forbidden for women. Since society has positioned women and natural resources at the vulnerable side of the socio-cultural systems, they suffer the most when the environment is degraded. Conversely, if women are empowered through skill development and society does not alienate them from certain occupations that are ascribed as only male-bound, then the effect will not only change the long-held structurally arranged norms but will also improve the living conditions and status of women in Ghana.

In spite of the fact that women have some natural tendencies, the absurdities in priority are observed in the romanticization of female drivers in the industry and a pessimistic characterization of male colleagues. The ideology of essentializing "feminine driving style" in the male-dominated industry whereas associating aggressive driving with masculinity is problematic. First and foremost, such philosophy does not address the complexities of inequality and power asymmetry in gender but an ideology that can potentially develop a "wicked problem"; that is, an effort to solve one aspect of a problem may expose or create other problems (Ritchey, 2013: 2). Particularly, the objectives of the "Women Moving the City" project can weaken the mainstreaming goal due to its defence for women empowerment and discredit of the male drivers in the process. Female drivers would eventually become more powerful because of the sense that their male colleagues are incompetent and reckless. Going forward, the phenomenon of gender bias will not be solved but rather reverse the power imbalance of the relationship between men and women in the industry. Additionally, the veneration of women as less aggressive behind the wheels exposes the problematic nature of the female social upbringing in such a masculine society. This contention is raised because the socialization process of women within the Ghanaian and to a large extent, the African context is such that young women suffer the culture of oppression, inferior sense of self to young men with attendant marginalization and abuse (Alabi et al., 2014: 397; Ebeli, 2016: 21). That is to say, the early processes of education and nurturing of young girls prevent them from speaking out when they want to, have no decision making power, be polite and obedient to young men and parents, all of which inflict strong attitudes of timidity, fear and less aggression. In such a case, the glorified attributes of women having to be less aggressive drivers are actually socialized traits of oppression of women. On the other hand, the same processes also nurture men to be aggressive due to the high sense of self-esteem "the can-do attitude" that manifests in driving. In such a masculine society, men tend to show their bossy and domineering tendencies by driving faster, reckless and disregard for safety interventions. Consequently, the magnificent essentialism of women driving manners and the aspersions of their male colleagues are the products of the detrimental traits of culture that reappear inversely in driving. Thirdly, promoting gender equality should not be classified as a competition between males and females professional bus drivers. To cause certain structural changes, creating a competitive stage that seeks to circumvent other dominant groups has the potential of engendering acrimonious attitudes that in turn could stimulate conflict among groups or sexes. Relevance should be placed on harnessing individual and collective strengths to work towards mutual goals without alienation or domination. To achieve the best driver resource and gender equality, raising awareness, building self-confidence and expanding choices, increasing people's access to and control over resources (OSAGI, 2001: 2) should instead be prioritized.

Likewise, the stakeholders of the "Women Moving Trucks" project maintain that the problem of fuel theft is non-existent because of the company's use of all females to despatch and haul fuel to mining and construction industries in Ghana. Although, through the intervention of this project, the Ghanaian fuel logistics industry and the entire society can now embrace the idea that driving heavy-duty trucks is not only bound to men, however, the prioritization of women as the symbol of positivity for the industry does not provide a definite resolution to the disproportionate representation of women in the industry and their conclusion suffers two censures. Similar to the case of the "Women Moving the City" project, this project portrays a circumventive discourse of discrediting male truckers in the fuel logistics industry. Since it is a male-dominated industry, the existence of thievery does not suggest that male drivers are the problem and female drivers are the solution. A scientific justification is required to substantiate such claims and since these justifications are non-existent, it is evidently prejudicial to ascribe high integrity to one sex and corruption to the other. Following from the previous point, the correlation between women's attributive features (caring, cautious and protective) as suggested by the project CEO and the absence of fuel theft is not satisfactorily established. This causal fallacy, non-causa pro causa, "not the-cause for a cause", indicates the causal establishment as one without enough evidence. More empirical cases and research need to be conducted to ascertain the certainty and level of correlation.

An argument can be advanced against this essentialization assertion in the sense that in a situation whereby male heavy-duty truckers are trained in similar ethical standards, theoretical and practical training equally as their female counterparts, similar results could be achieved.

In Ghana a high number of truck drivers acquire their skills through informal training, the "driver and mate (trainee) system" where the trainee acquire their skills on the job without going through complex educational and formal training system. Overgeneralisation and stereotypes in gender in the bid to achieve parity actually weakens the goals of the initiatives within the commercial transport industry in Ghana. The projects should aim at focusing on strategies that will make women and men benefit equally without exaggerating or demeaning the other. Since women are disproportionately represented in the industry, improving the conditions of the minority who are already in the industry can attract others who do not see the opportunity of making a career out of trucking.

6. Conclusion

The study established the explanatory discourse and review between the theoretical assumptions of ecofeminism and the gender mainstreaming projects in the Ghanaian commercial transport and logistics industry. Acknowledging the male-dominance of the industry, the two projects aimed to alleviate the disproportionate representation of women and fuel theft in the transport and storage industry. Using a deductive method of reasoning, the study described and explained the objectives and activities of the projects from the cultural ecofeminist perspective and a thorough critique of the projects.

The global distribution of females' representation in the bus and the heavy-duty trucking industry is comparatively low to males. The masculinity within the industry stands out as the product of the institutionalized socio-cultural norms that alienate women from becoming professional bus and truck drivers. Mainstreaming gender equality is, therefore, the answer to the disparities in the Ghanaian transport industry. With the "Women Moving the City" project, the enormity of the impact has been estimated to be huge from fuel and life to spare-parts savings. Also, the female truckers in the "Women Moving Trucks" project have eliminated the problem of fuel theft in the logistics industry. However, the essentialism of "feminine driving style" and denigration of males' drivers as aggressive suffers the problems of generalization, illogicality and reverse asymmetries of power within gender. Instead, priority should be accorded to the utilization of individual and collective strengths without any form of alienation or denigration. Much awareness about gender equality within the industry need to be raised, building self-confidence and expanding choices, increasing people's access to and control over resources. Through this, we can work towards mutual goals of gender equality.

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